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‘The Evolution of Deirdriu in the Ulster Cycle’

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Presented for the degree of PhD by research

University of Edinburgh

2010

Declaration of Own Work

I, Kate Louise Mathis, declare that this thesis is my own, original work. No part of it has previously been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, and no part of it has been composed in collaboration with any other individual, except where the assistance of another individual has been acknowledged.

Signed:

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Prefatory note

This thesis is concerned with tracing the gradual evolution of Deirdriu's character within the Ulster Cycle, through the analysis of various texts in which she is described. These texts belong to a number of different periods, and utilise a variety of nomenclature to describe Deirdriu and the three sons of Uisliu. Each of these variations is noted, at the point at which each text is initially described. Within the discussion of each one, however, with the intention of fostering clarity at all times, the following practices, most of them compromises susceptible to reasonable criticism, have been adopted throughout the text:

Throughout the general discussion, i.e. in chapters 1, 2, and 5, the form 'Deirdriu' has been employed, as the earliest form, i.e. within the text of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, in which any version of the character's name is extant. 'Deirdriu' is also employed throughout the discussion of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* itself, within chapter 3. 'Maic Uislenn' (*maic Uislenn*) designates the earlier form of the collective term for the three sons of Uisliu, and is used accordingly. Throughout the discussion of the later tradition of material in chapter 4, namely the Glenmasan Manuscript, RIA B iv 1, and *Foras Feasa Ar Éirinn*, the form 'Deirdre' is employed, to distinguish the characteristics of the character's depiction within this strand from her depiction within *Longes mac n-Uislenn*. Regarding the three brothers, the form *maic Uisnig* is employed, as it was employed by Donald Mackinnon in his edition of *The Glenmasan Manuscript*, which forms the basis of the text for subsequent analysis.

Where a manuscript belonging to the National Library of Scotland is referred to, the original NLS catalogue number has been provided in addition to the Advocates' Library references with which these were replaced, for ease of reference in conjunction with Donald Mackinnon's *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts* (1912).

Abbreviations

CMCS – *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*
DIL – Dictionary of the Irish Language
EC – *Études Celtiques*
Egerton – Egerton 1782
FFE – *Foras Feasa Ar Éirinn*
LL – *Leabhar Laignech* (the ‘Book of Leinster’)
LMU – *Longes mac n-Uislenn*
OCU – *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*
RC – *Révue Celtique*
SPIL – Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language
TBF – *Táin Bó Flidais*
TBF² – the second recension of *Táin Bó Flidais*
TE – *Talland Étair*
TLA – *Tochmarc Luaine agus Aided Athairne*
vn – verbal noun
YBL – *Leabhar Buide Leacain* (the ‘Yellow Book of Lecan’)
ZCP – *Zeitschrift für Celtisches Philologie*

Deirdriu/ Deirdre: Textual Descent and Popular Perception

Few figures in Irish literature have inspired such systematic interest or critical interpretation as Deirdriu, or Deirdre of the Sorrows. Examination of her role in two tales, *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*, as the girl chosen by Conchobor who departs from Ulster with one of his warriors, has been undertaken as part of commentary upon the place of the tales in which Deirdriu appears within the wider Ulster Cycle, as *remscéla* to *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, and with regard to her depiction in comparison to other female figures within the Irish literary canon, perceived as either aberrant or troublesome. She has been compared to Gráinne and to Iseult within the wider European tradition. Critics have found within Deirdriu's character aspects as diverse as that of euhemerized sovereignty goddess and compassionate housewife. For the majority of these commentators, focus has fallen upon the consideration of Deirdriu within the context of the earliest source in which she is depicted, the ninth-century Early Irish tale *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, but with frequent reference to characteristics, such as the gift of prophecy and foresight, properly attributed to the character only within the later tradition. Moreover, little or no distinction is drawn by these critics between the narrative thread represented by *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, and the later medieval series of texts usually referred to, collectively, as *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*. Focus upon Deirdriu's potential to embody recognisable literary stereotypes, such as the sovereignty goddess, or the disruptive woman whose interference threatens bonds of loyalty between a warrior and his overlord, has superseded the distinction of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* as interrelated, yet individual strands of complex narrative. This focus has also replaced the analysis of Deirdriu as a character, whose contemporary reputation should be regarded as quite distinct from her depiction within the context of the primary material by which she was initially described.

In recent years increasing attention has been paid to the literary qualities of the Early Irish tale cycles (e.g. McCone 1990; Ó Cathasaigh 1977, 1985, 1994; Dooley 2006), and to specific discussions focusing upon the role of the character, pertinent to the narrative structure of a particular text (Nagy 1989; Ó Cathasaigh 1989). The role of female characters, within *Táin Bó Cuailnge* and the wider Ulster Cycle, has also been subject to considerable reassessment (e.g. Dooley 1994; Kelly 1992; Ní Bhrolcháin 1994; Findon 1997), finally eschewing the notion that beneath the “barely-human” skins of all female figures described by medieval Irish literary texts lurks “a submerged pre-Christian goddess” (id., 1). Assessment of Deirdriu, however, has moved further and further away from analysis of the character within its strictest literary context, or with regard to her characterisation in context of the development of material concerning her

relationship with Conchobor and the *maic Uislenn*, the three sons of Uisliu, between the two main narrative strands by which it is described (i.e. *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*). Máire Herbert's work on *Longes mac n-Uislenn* (1991, 1992) re-emphasises the allegedly sovereign aspect of the relationship between Deirdriu, Noísiu and Conchobor, associating Deirdriu with female defiance of male authority and the equation “female/ male: nature/ culture”, within which Deirdriu embodies the disobedient, destructive force of nature (1992, e.g. 56). Herbert does not, however, re-examine the validity of locating either concept within the textual structure of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* itself. Cornelius Buttimer's interpretation of the tale (1994–5), on the other hand, provides a thorough textual analysis of its successive episodes, but fails to define the characterisation of Deirdriu in relation to her widely-divergent portrayal within the later tradition. Neither Herbert nor Buttimer distinguishes between the characterisation of Deirdriu, and that of 'Deirdre' within *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*, nor questions whether the development of Deirdriu into the 'Deirdre' of the later tradition is deliberate, connected to a considered development of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* into the Early Modern period, or results from a less formal accretion of differing, or innovative, material at the hands of later redactors. Recent work on *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* (Breatnach 1994, 1996; Ó hUiginn 2006), suggests that its contents cannot be analysed separately from its manuscript context, especially as regards the complicated nature of its earliest exemplar, the late-fifteenth-century Glenmasan Manuscript (Edinburgh Adv. Lib. 72.2.3).

To the knowledge of the present author, neither Herbert, Buttimer, nor any other critic has questioned the validity of regarding *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* as tales that are primarily concerned with the portrayal and description of Deirdriu. This approach is prevalent to the extent that it is common to find articles entitled, 'Celtic Heroine? The Archaeology of the Deirdre Story' (Herbert 1991), 'The Universe of Male and Female: A Reading of the Deirdre Story' (Herbert 1992), or critiques of undifferentiated material properly belonging to both early and later traditions, designated as chronological episodes within a generic 'Deirdre tale' (e.g. Cormier 1976–8; del Collo 1999; Gabriel 1995; O'Leary 1987). This trait is not confined to recent scholarship, but may be seen in the work of the first critical or quasi-critical examinations of Deirdriu's characterisation, such as Eleanor Hull's 'The Story of Deirdre, in its bearing on the social development of the folk-tale' (1904), or Alice Macdonnell's 'Deirdre – The Highest Type of Celtic Womanhood' (1912, 1913). This thesis will argue that Deirdriu's immense popularity during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish Literary Revival has affected subsequent critics' attitudes towards the analysis of the texts by which she was originally described, i.e. *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*. It will also argue that this popularity resulted in the separation of perceptions of the literary figure, deemed “the loveliest and most tragic woman of her time” (Dobbs 1923, 86), from the context of the character

defined by *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*, and that, furthermore, this popularity has discouraged the evaluation of other aspects of both texts.

This thesis will reassess the precise nature of the content, structure, and manuscript transmission of the textual witnesses to *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*. It will assess the validity of regarding both texts as being primarily concerned with the portrayal of Deirdriu. It will also contend that the composition of both texts, and the differing presentation of similar characters between *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*, is directly connected to the structural principles of each one, and should be distinguished from the more general development of other portmanteau texts, notably *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, which also survive in several versions between the Early Medieval and Early Modern periods. The content of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* will be considered through comprehensive textual analysis of the extant witnesses to each. The criteria with which previous editors, in particular of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* (e.g. Stokes 1887; Mac Giolla Léith 1993), have chosen to present their respective editions, will also be assessed, and a new approach suggested. The validity of continuing to refer to the post-*Longes mac n-Uislenn* material under the single title 'Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach' will be considered. It will be demonstrated how other Early Medieval and Early Modern texts concerning Deirdriu, Conchobor, the *maic Uislenn* and, in particular, Fergus mac Róich, such as *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*, *Fochunn Loingse Fergusa mac Roig*, and two recensions of *Táin Bó Flidais*, may have contributed to the construction of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*, and to the differing portrayal of these characters within each one. Ultimately, this thesis will argue that several distinct strands of material relating to Deirdriu, the *maic Uislenn*, Conchobor, and Fergus mac Róich may be identified. The first of these strands is largely similar to the present definition of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*; the second descends from the presentation of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* within the Glenmasan Manuscript, whilst the third, similar to, but distinct from the other two, descends from the presentation of Deirdriu within Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*.

The first chapter will describe the manuscript tradition of each narrative strand, from *Longes mac n-Uislenn* to 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach' within *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, as well as previous critics' commentary upon each text. The second chapter considers the efficacy of several potential approaches to the critical treatment of medieval tales, and declares the intention of this thesis to prioritise both textual analysis, and the importance of a character's, or series of characters', presentation, to the overall structure of a particular text. The third chapter describes the content and episodic structure of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, and analyses the characterisation of Deirdriu within that text. The fourth chapter describes the development of texts in which Deirdriu

is described which post-date *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, notably material from the Glenmasan manuscript and RIA B iv 1. The relationship of several other texts concerned with the depiction of Conchobor, the *maic Uislenn*, and Fergus mac Róich, will also be assessed. The fifth chapter argues that the characterisation of Deirdriu within the Ulster Cycle constitutes a form of commentary upon the flawed nature of Conchobor mac Nessa's kingship of Ulster – within the earlier tradition – and upon the compromised honour of Fergus mac Róich within the later.

Chapter One
Critical Perceptions of Deirdriu/ Deirdre, *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*

Synopsis

This chapter will outline: the manuscript tradition of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*; the place of this text within the Early Irish tale-lists; other references to the *maic Uislenn*; an historiography of critical interpretations of the text and its characters, from James Macpherson to the writers of the Irish Renaissance; the manuscript tradition of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*; an historiography of critical interpretations of the text and its characters; an overview of critical commentary on *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* and Deirdriu.

1: Manuscripts of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, and earliest references to *Clann Uislenn*

1.1: Manuscripts of prose versions

Only three copies of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* [LMU] are known in manuscript form, dated between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. Only one of these manuscripts includes a title, whilst the others are identified from their concluding colophons (see 1.1.6, below).

1.1.2: *Leabhar Laighech*

MS TCD H.2.18, *Lebor na Nuachongbála* or *The Book of Leinster* [LL], begun circa 1160 (Thurneysen 1921, 36; cf. O’Sullivan 1966, 26–28). The copy of LMU has no title. The text occupies folios 192 recto col. b, line 11, to 193 recto col. b, line 24.¹ Its colophon reads: *Longas mac Usnig in-sin 7 longas Fergus 7 aided mac n-Uisnig 7 Derdrend*, ‘the exile of the Sons of Uisneach here, and the exile of Fergus, and the death of the Sons of Uisneach and of Deirdriu’.

1.1.3: *Leabhar Buide Leacain*

MS TCD H.2.16, *Leabhar Buide Leacain* or *The Yellow Book of Lecan* [YBL], compiled between the late fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Thurneysen 1921, 51; Best 1949, 190). The text, entitled *Loinges mac n-Uisleand*, occupies columns 749, line 20 until the final line of 753, suggesting that it did not form part of the original 165 leaves of YBL described by the inscriptions *ar buidhe leacain ainm an leabairse meise Cirruaidh mac Taidg Ruaidh* (foot of col. 380) and *iste liber in se continet centum lxx (a) folia* (foot of col. 400)². Only eight of these leaves are now contained in H.2.16,³ the rest of whose contents, including the pages upon which our tale occurs, were bound in subsequently. Hull notes that “throughout this copy [of LMU] a

1 In the facsimile of LL (Atkinson 1880) the tale occupies page 259 col. b, line 11 to 261 col. b, line 24 (Hull 1949, 3).

2 (a) in superscript in manuscript.

3 R. I. Best (1949, 191) notes that the 165 leaves of YBL also contained copies of *Leabhar Gabhála* and the *Annals of Tigernach* which, in addition to the eight surviving leaves (pages 1–30 in the facsimile; Atkinson 1880a), comprise only one half of the original YBL proper.

later hand seems to have introduced numerous erasures, corrections, and marks of division between words” (1949, 4), but it is unclear whether these comments were the work of a single scribe at the time of the tale's addition to the expanding YBL manuscript, or of several later commentators.

The colophon reads: *Loinges Mac N-Uislenn 7 longes Fergusa 7 aided Derdrinne*, 'the exile of the Sons of Uisliu here, and the exile of Fergus, and the death of Deirdriu'.

1.1.4: Egerton 1782

MS British Museum Egerton 1782, compiled circa 1517 in Co. Roscommon, by scribes belonging to the Ó Maelconaire family (Flower 1926, 262). The tale commences at folio 67, recto, and concludes at folio 69, verso, line 9. It has no title, concluding with the colophon *Luingius Mac N-Uislenn ann-sin 7 fochunn luingsi Ferguso 7 aged Derdrinne*, 'the exile of the Sons of Uisliu here, and the cause of the exile of Fergus, and the death of Deirdriu'.

The content of these three versions is described in **3**, below.

1.1.5: Other copies of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*

Two other copies of LMU exist, both transcripts from Egerton 1782: MS TCD H.1.13, pp.323–27, and NLI G 138 (formerly 17089) of the Phillips Collection of Irish Manuscripts, pp.129–36. TCD H.1.13, located under the heading *Historical and Romantic Tales and Poems*, was transcribed in 1782 by Hugh O'Daly. It is entitled *Longeas Mac Uisnigh* (Abbott and Gwynn 1921, 40, 42). The text of H.1.13, alongside O'Daly's version of *Oidheadh Chloinne Uisneach* [OCU] from TCD H.1.6,⁴ was printed by Theophilus O'Flanagan in 1808 (cf. 2.3, below).

Hull notes that his edition of LMU takes account of neither transcript, “since they obviously possess no independent authority for the establishment of the correct readings” (1949, 4).

1.1.6: The Tale-Lists

As noted (1.1, above), only the text of LMU in YBL commences with a title, there *Loinges mac n-Uisleand* (col. 749, l.20). Both LL and Egerton 1782 identify their respective texts only in concluding colophons. Given that the earliest extant version of LMU is found in LL, however, it is apparent that by the time of the compilation of this manuscript some version of a tale known by this general description to include the exile and death of the *maic Uislenn* and Deirdriu was in circulation, and considered worthy of inclusion by the compiler (the fact that the name of Fergus

⁴ Entitled *Collection of Romances, Historical Poems and Genealogies*, made for Dr. Francis Sullivan of Trinity College. Page 50 of the MS notes the date of compilation as 1758 (Abbott and Gwynn 1921, 13).

would appear to have been associated with both these events from at least this period onwards will be considered in 3 2.3, below). LL appears to contain the earliest-surviving example of Deirdriu's name in written form, whilst additional evidence suggests that the exploits and death of the *maic Uislenn* had been celebrated prior to this date, possibly as early as the latter half of the ninth century (cf. 1.2 and 1.3, below).

LL also contains, however, a copy of Tale-List A (Mac Cana 1980a, 41–49). Whilst mention of the exploits of the *maic Uislenn* and Deirdriu is absent from the 'loinges' section of this list, under the heading of *aitheda*, 'wooing-tales', we find *A[ithed] Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, 'the elopement of Deirdriu with the Sons of Uisliu' (id., 46). There is no evidence within Tale-List A itself to suggest that this title referred to anything beyond an episode describing some form of elopement involving characters with these names, but it is probable that some reference to the circumstances resulting in this event, as well as the manner in which it was concluded, would also have formed part of the tale, and that the title encompasses at least part of the text now known as LMU (Mac Giolla Léith 1989, 408; cf. 3 2.3, below). If this suggestion is correct, it confirms that Deirdriu's name had been coupled with those of the *maic Uislenn* at least as early as the date of compilation of LL, circa 1160. What is less certain is the stage at which Deirdriu's part in the tale came to be accorded greater significance than that of the *maic Uislenn*, as the title in Tale-List A would suggest, in comparison to earlier references to the brothers when it is their martial prowess alone that is celebrated (cf. 1.3, below).

Given the series of events at the close of LMU, as a result of which Fergus mac Róich and three hundred warriors leave Ulster and take refuge at the court of Ailill and Medb in Cruachan (LMU ll. 191–204), two other titles within Tale-List A have been provisionally identified as references to precursors of episodes involving Fergus within LMU: *Tochomlod Longsi Fergusa a hUtaib* 'the precipitation of the exile of Fergus from Ulster'⁵ (Mac Giolla Léith 1989, 407–08; Carney 1983, 125–27) and *Feis Cruachan*, 'the feast of Cruachan'. *Tochomlod Longsi Fergusa a hUtaib* was thought by James Carney to refer to the incomplete text *Fochunn Loingse Fergusa mac Roich*, also found in LL folio 185v 7–52, which, he argued, was replaced by LMU as the "explanation for the exile of Fergus [from Ulster]" (1979, 234–35). Margaret Dobbs connected the *Tochomlod* with the "full account [of Fergus' departure] given in the long version of *Táin Bo Flidais*" (1953, 57), also noting that the *feis* in *Feis Cruachan* "may be that described in the long version of *Táin Bó Flidais*" (1953, 52), i.e. the text which accompanies the earliest extant text of OCU within the Glenmasan manuscript (cf. 4 1.3.8, below).⁶

⁵ *Tochomlud* is the vn. of *do-comlai*, the 'act of proceeding or advancing'; DIL D 594, 205.

⁶ Tale-List A also lists *Táin Bó Flidais* as a separate title which, following Dobbs's reasoning, would refer to the older, shorter tale of this name also found in LL.

Tale-List B (Mac Cana 1980a, 53–60) omits mention of both LMU and *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*. The text found in Edinburgh Adv. Lib. VII and BL Harleian 432, tentatively entitled Tale-List C by Mac Cana (id., 64–65), notes only that *tana*, *tochmarca* and *oideada* are three of the seven possible types of *primscélae*, beneath which heading any of the tales seeking to establish the reason for Fergus’ presence in Cruachan at the start of *Táin Bó Cuailnge* might be included. Tale-List B, however, does contain the titles *Longes nUlad*, *Tochustal Ulad* (‘the mustering of the Ulstermen’), and *Tochomlod Longsi Fergus a hUlaib*, any and/ or all of which may refer to events leading to Fergus’ departure from Ulster, i.e. the *Fochunn Loingse Fergus mac Roich* deemed by Carney the precursor of LMU.

Gregory Toner’s re-evaluation of the construction of Tale-Lists A and B (2000) concluded that List B should properly be thought of as “a conflation of two originally distinct lists, namely, X and another list of independent origin” (id., 93).⁷ The ‘list of independent origin’, referred to by Toner as Bx, comprises the titles in List B from the *tochmarca* as far as *Orgain Ratha Buirig*, thus including *Tochomlod Longsi Fergus a hUlaib*. *Longus nUlad* and *Tochustal Ulad*, however, are contained within the section of List B derived from X, referred to as B1 (comprising the titles up to and including the *tochmarca*). By inference, therefore, List X contained *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn* – suggested by its inclusion in List A – as well as *Longus nUlad* and *Tochustal Ulad*, whilst Bx, the ‘list of independent origin’, contained only *Tochomlod Longsi Fergus a hUlaib*.

List →	X	A	B1	Bx
Title/s found ↓				
	<i>Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn</i>	<i>Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn</i>	<i>Longus nUlad</i>	<i>Tochomlod Longsi Fergus a hUlaib</i>
	<i>Longus nUlad</i>		<i>Tochustal Ulad</i>	
	<i>Tochustal Ulad</i>			

(Figure 1)

As noted above, the earliest extant example of Deirdriu’s name in written form occurs within LL, in the copy of LMU within that manuscript. LL also contains the earliest copy of List A, in which we also find *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, suggesting that the *terminus ante quem* for the existence of a character with Deirdriu’s name and, presumably, at least some of the

⁷ X refers to the parent list, from which most of List A was also derived.

characteristics of the Deirdriu of LMU, would be circa 1160. Toner rejects Mac Cana's argument (1980a, 83) that X, the parent list – and thus, potentially, the tale entitled *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn* – could be dated to circa 1000, in favour of assigning a date of circa 1000 to B1 and a *terminus ante quem* of circa 1160 to X itself (i.e. the date of compilation of LL, the earliest extant copy of List A). Analysing the contiguous alliteration of List A, however, Toner concluded that most of its titles were copied from an older original, O, probably composed during the tenth century, containing in the region of 140 titles, and whose alliterative structure may have been designed as a mnemonic aid (id., 102–04 [cf. Sproule 1987, 198–99], 113–14). X, and thus A and B1, were ultimately derived from this, whilst Bx derived from an independent source. O, by inference from the contents of X, A and B1, may have contained the titles *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, *Longus nUlad* and *Tochustal Ulad*, although it is by no means certain which, whilst the title within Bx, *Tochomlod Longsi Fergusa a hUlaib*, is the earliest extant title to which a putative date may be attached (suggesting, furthermore, that Carney was correct in his assertion that an earlier description of the departure of Fergus from Ulster was superseded by LMU).⁸

1.2: Earlier references to the fate of *Clann Uislenn*

Prior to the occurrence of the *maic Uislenn* in LMU their names occur in two extant texts. Noísiu's heroic qualities are celebrated singly in a third. Each text provides some suggestion of the reputation for martial prowess with which the brothers were endowed, apparently prior to the involvement of Deirdriu in their lives.

1.2.1: 'Innid scél scaílte n-airich'

This poem, composed by Flannacán Mac Cellaich (*recte* 'Flannacán mac Cellaich úa Carmen', Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 11; cf. Breatnach 1994–5, 200), king of Bregia, constitutes “practically the earliest independent evidence we possess of the existence of Old Irish versions of many of our *prímscéla*” (Mulchrone 1949, 82). Although it is preserved in the later part of YBL (Atkinson 1880a, 125; cf. 1.1.3) its composition necessarily pre-dates the death of the poet, slain during a Viking assault in 896. Thurneysen was also of the opinion that Flannacán, three of whose heirs predeceased him, composed the poem sometime during his own youth.⁹ It relates, in simple mnemonic form, the deaths of various Ulster heroes upon each of the seven days of the week, a concept probably suggested by the statement in *Aided Con Chulainn* that its hero was slain on a Wednesday (Mac Cana 1980, 109). The poet may also have had recourse to a version of Tale-List O, i.e. the ultimate parent to later lists exemplified by those within LL or RIA 23 N 10 (id.,

⁸ The implications of this suggestion for the structure and composition of LMU will be discussed in 3.2.3, below.

⁹ Mac Cana (1980, 109) opined that “we shall be in little danger of serious error if we assign it to a date c.750”, but this is surely a mistake for 'c.850', some forty rather than 140 years prior to the date of Flannacán's death.

111; cf. 1.1.6, above). The eighth quatrain of Flannacán's poem begins:

*Luan i mbitha meic Uslend,
ar Banba, condeic ndrechach*

"Monday the sons of Uisliu were slain – the ruin of Banba, [is?] a comely comparison" (Mulchrone 1949, 83, 87).

Reference to the death of Fergus mac Róich is absent from the poem, a fact that may be considered suggestive,¹⁰ but the twentieth quatrain announces that *Eogan éolach meic Durthacht* ('Eogan the learned') died on a Friday (id., 84). Mulchrone suggests that he is the third judge of the three named by the *Senchas Már* whose death is commemorated by Flannacán's poem (the other two, Fachtna mac Sencha and Morann, feature in quatrain ten), but also that "the king of Fernmag (Farney), who was slain by Fergus mac Róich in revenge for the murdered sons of Uisliu, may be the same man" (id., 91). Even if this identification is accepted, however, the poem itself suggests no particular connection between the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* and the death of Eogan, nor that his death was a direct consequence of the brothers' deaths being avenged (Fergus' absence might also be considered strange in this context, but for the fact that causes of death for other heroes mentioned within the poem are not normally provided). Nor does the poem indicate whether or not Deirdriu's name was associated with those of the *maic Uislenn* at this stage.

1.2.2: 'Aidheda Forni Do h-Uaislib Erenn'

The verses entitled *Aidheda Forni Do H-Uaislib Erenn*, 'The violent deaths of a number of nobles of Ireland', are ascribed by the *Annals of Tigernach* to the authorship of Cinaed Úa hArtacáin, fl. circa 975, and have been described, accordingly, by Whitley Stokes as a valuable resource for "proving the existence, in the tenth century, of a mass of traditions respecting the ancient Irish heroes" (1902, 303). Vernam Hull (1949, 5–6), however, disagreed with Stokes's acceptance of the attribution to Cinaed, arguing that although their composition must necessarily pre-date the compilation of LL (c.1160–70) – given that a copy of the text is preserved in that manuscript – the lateness of the verses' language precludes that their composition occurred prior to AD 1000. The verses constitute, nevertheless, the next-eldest surviving evidence for the existence of a basic tradition concerning the *maic Uislenn* prior to *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, following the reference within 'Innid scél scaíltir n-airich'.

Aidheda Forni Do H-Uaislib Erenn survives, imperfectly, in three manuscripts – LL, Bod. Lib. Laud 610, and Egerton 1782.

¹⁰ Mac Cana noted that, of the violent death-tales within Tale-List A only *Aided Fhergus*, "which in the context of the list probably refers to [the death of] Fergus mac Roich", does not appear to have informed a quatrain of Flannacán's poem (1980, 111). More tentatively, omission of the death of Fergus mac Róich from a poem which commemorates fallen heroes of the Ulaid might also suggest that the poet considered Fergus' literary reputation unsuitable to merit his inclusion here (see 4.1.4, below).

LL pp. 31a– 32: (Atkinson 1880b)

17: *Guin mac n-Uslend, ba helgna,
fescur ar brú na hEmna.
nirbo chian iarsin mebail
congóet Fiacha i Temair.*

18. *Ina ndigail, nirbu rom,
gaeth Gergend mac illadon,
la mac Rossa frith a lecht
ocus Eogan mac Durthecht.*

“(17) The slaying of Uisliu’s sons, – ‘twas of malice aforethought – at eve on the brink of Emain: it was not long after the disgrace that Fiacha was slain in Tara. (18) In avenging them – it was not soon – Gerg son of Illad was slain: by the son of Ross his grave was found, and [that of] Eogan son of Durthecht”.¹¹

Laud 610, fol. 74a 2 (Stokes 1902, 318ff.)

Verse 17 (as LL, except for repetition of *ba helgna* in the first line) is glossed *.i. Naise, Ardan, Ainnle. Eogan mac Durthacht rodos-marb tria forcongru Concubair* following *guin macc Uislend* – “that is, Naise, Ardan, Ainnle. Eogan son of Durthacht killed them upon Conchobor's orders” (id., 320, 336). Verse 18 (as LL, except *inand digail* for *ina ndigail* in the first line, and *goet* for *gaeth* in line two) is glossed *.i. athair Munremair* following *Gerchend macc Illadon* (sic; id., 321).

Egerton 1782, fol. 52a (id., 323ff.)

17. *Guin mac n-Uislenn ba helgno
fescur ar bru na hEmno,
ni rochián iarsin mebuil
gaéta Fiachna 'na ndeguidh.*

18. *Ina ndígail, nírbo rom,
gaet Cerrcen mac Illadon,
re mac Roaig frith a lecht
ocus Eoghan mac Durrtecht.*

[translation as LL except “it was not long after the disgrace that Fiachna was slain, following immediately afterwards” for lines 3 and 4 of verse 17]¹².

Following *'na ndeguidh*, verse 17 is glossed *.i. Eogan mac Durthacht ros-marb tre forcongra Conchobair ar foesam Fergus* following *na hEmno* – “that is, Eogan son of Durthacht killed them upon Conchobor's orders [though they were] under the safeguard of Fergus” – and *.i. Fergus dano ro marb Fiacha mac Conchobair a ndígail mac nUisnigh*, “that is, Fergus,

¹¹ Stokes translates the fourth line of verse 18 as “and by Eogan son of Durthacht” (id, 309), but this would appear to be an error. It is more likely that Eogan was also killed by Fergus as recompense for the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, than that he took part in avenging their murder himself by assisting in the death of Gercce mac Illadan. This potential ambiguity might, however, be responsible for the subsequent glossing of the same verse in Egerton 1782 (see below).

¹² For *(in)na ndeguidh* see DIL I 199, 222.

moreover, killed Fiacha son of Conchobor in revenge for the sons of Uisneach”, (id., 326, 336). Verse 18 is glossed *.i. is a ndígail mac nUisnig ro marbad Gerrcenn athair Munreamhair* – “that is, in revenge for the sons of Uisneach Gerrcenn father of Munremar was killed” – following the second line, and *.i. is na ndigail ro marb Fergus Eoghan mac Durrthecht ri Fernmoighe*, “that is, in revenge for them Fergus killed Eogan son of Durthact, king of Fernmagh [Farney]”, following line four (id., 326, 337).

Of great interest for the present study is Deirdriu's absence from the text, despite the fact that, as we have seen, both LL and Egerton 1782 also contain prose versions of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* (1.1.2 and 1.1.4, above). Moreover, the glossing of the verses within Egerton 1782 suggests that, whilst its scribe was keen to add further information to the basic content of the verses, his emphasis is focused upon the consequences of the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* rather than the means by which the deaths were procured. For the Egerton scribe, the avenging role of Fergus is most conspicuous. The *ba helgna* common to the first line of verse 17 in all three versions is more suggestive of Conchobor's role within *Longes mac n-Uislenn* rather than Deirdriu's, but it is not clear whose behaviour the phrase was intended to recall.

1.2.3: 'Clanna Ollaman Uaisle Emna'

This anonymous poem, concerning the history of the Christian kings of Ulster, was written in the reign of Eochaid mac Duinnshléibe, i.e. 1158–1166 (Byrne 1964, 54). The poet, praising the valorous deeds of successive kings of Ulster, compares their achievements and attributes to the heroism of a series of both native Irish and Classical warriors. The first lines of the fifth verse read as follows:

*Alexandair Naíse nertmar -
rena néim Troí ocus Táin [...]*

“Powerful Naíse [is] Alexandros: their splendid beauty caused [the siege of] Troy and the Táin” (id., 62, 76).

Byrne's note on his translation expresses the belief that the mere mention of Noísiu's name would have been sufficient to recall to an audience of the poem the fuller story of the *maic Uislenn* and their association with Deirdriu. He asserts that, “just as the abduction of Helen by Paris (whom Homer usually prefers to call Alexandros) was the cause of the Trojan war, so the elopement of Deirdre and Noíse [sic] formed a *rem-scél* to the *Táin [Bó Cuailnge]*” (id., 81–82 n.6).

In verse four, Fergus' reputation is also associated with that of a Classical character:

Fergus Énias re lúad loinges

glé-dias buan nar choimse i cath

“Aeneas [is] Fergus where exile is considered, – a bright, constant pair who had no equals in battle” (id., 61, 76).

Byrne notes that “a less honourable similarity between Aeneas and Fergus is tacitly implied, for in the late classical and medieval tradition Aeneas was regarded as a traitor” (id., 81 n.4).

1.3: Other references to *Clann Uislenn*

Vernam Hull (1949, 6 n.10) notes the occurrence of several other references to the *maic Uislenn* in texts which post-date the inclusion of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* within LL, YBL and Egerton 1782 (cf. Tymoczko 1985–6, 165–66, n.42). With the exception of those texts referring to the *maic Uislenn* in relation to Fergus mac Róich (for which see 4, below), these are listed as follows:

1.3.1: In *Leabhar Laignech*

'The Violent Deaths of Goll and Garb'

This tale, whose earliest version occurs in LL, folios 107b–111b (Stokes 1893, 396), describes the combat of Cú Chulainn against two hostile opponents, Goll son of Carbad the king of Germany, who attempts to invade Ireland, and Garb ('the Rough') who kills fifty warriors of Ulster as their host passes by his dwelling. Having overcome both opponents, Cú Chulainn continues to Emain only to find it empty, with all the other warriors attending a feast given by Conall Cearnach in their honour. Outraged that he was not invited, Cú Chulainn arrives at Conall Cearnach's gate and attempts to gain entry, initially under a false name, before his identity is realised and a host assembles to meet him. Conchobor and Fergus shout for their warriors to muster, including the three Sons of Uisliu, *Nóisi 7 Ánle 7 Arddán* (id., 426; cf. Buttimer 1994–5, 13).

A poem on Mac Dathó's pig

This poem refers to the same events described by *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó* (Thurneysen 1935, v), and is annexed to the end of that text within three manuscripts – LL, Harleian 5280 fol. 40r–42r, and TCD H.3.18 pp.743–48. As Thurneysen notes (ibid.) “the author has availed himself of the occasion [recounting those who requested that Mac Dathó's famous dog might be given to them] to exhibit his acquaintance with the names of Irish heroes in general, not merely with those mentioned in the tale”. The reference to the *maic Uislenn* occurs in the poem's fifth verse: *trí meic Uislenn cobra ngarg*, 'the three sons of Uisliu of fierce assistance' (id., 21).

Mesca Ulad, 'The intoxication of the Ulstermen'

This tale, concerned with Conchobor's accession to the kingship of Ulster, commences with the

description of a feast held at Emain Macha to which many warriors have been invited. Upon each warrior's arrival they are greeted by Cathbad, who asks a boon (*aiscid*) of each in exchange for sureties. Fintan mac Niall Niamglonnach requests that the *trí meic Uisnig anglonnaig*, *trí áenchaindli gascid na hÉorpa*, 'the three sons of Uisnech of splendid deeds, the three single torches of valour of Europe', Noísiu, Ainnle and Ardán, stand surety for his *aiscid* (Watson 1941, 5; cf. Buttimer 1994–5, 13). When the warriors specified return to Emain the following year, Fintan requests that his sureties make themselves known, and the *maic Uislenn* announce their presence (id., 8). They play, however, no part within the rest of the tale, and are not amongst the number of warriors pointed out to Medb and Ailill when the assembled Ulstermen gather to assault their fort at Temair Luachra. The brothers' presence appears to have been noted only because the renown of their 'splendid deeds' made them eminently suitable persons to be named as guarantors.

1.3.2: In *Leabhar Buidhe Leacain*

Cath Maige Rath

This tale occurs in two different versions within YBL. It was originally edited in conjunction with *Fleadh Dun na n-Gedh*, to which text, as its editor John O'Donovan notes, it is appended within the manuscript, following the description of the feast at which the difficulty between Domhnall mac Áeda and his foster-son first arises (1842, vii). *Fleadh Dun na n-Gedh* (id., 3–87; cf. Lehmann 1969), recounts how, having been cursed by a saint and forced to relocate his seat of kingship from Tara to *Dun na n-Gedh* ('the fort of the geese') on the banks of the Boyne, king Domhnall mac Aeda invites the nobles of Ireland to a feast in honour of his accession to the throne. The feast, however, is laid under a curse by a cleric from whom Domhnall's men have appropriated food, and the first man to consume it – Congal Claen, king of Ulster and foster-son to Domhnall – is thus doomed to wreak havoc with Ireland's current state of peace. Accordingly, Congal Claen gathers forces from Scotland and mainland Britain and joins battle with the forces of his foster-father Domhnall mac Áeda at Magh Rath. The tale entitled *Cath Maige Rath* recounts the subsequent battle. In MR I,¹³ confident of his chances in the conflict Congal recites a distinguished line of former heroes of Ulster, including *Náisi ocus Ainli is Ardan*, whose feats remain a source of pride amongst their people (id., 206). Congal also refers to *Naisi co n-a nert-bhraithrib*, 'Naisi and his mighty brothers', in a speech uttered directly before the battle begins (id., 220), in which their suitability to be ranked alongside those of the greatest martial prowess within Ulster is also repeated.

Congal's references to the *maic Uislenn* do not occur within MR II, the shorter of the versions of

¹³ Marstrander (1911, 227 n.1) designated the two versions of the tale found in YBL as MR I (YBL cols. 321–32) for the longer, later text and MR II for the shorter, earlier version.

Cath Maige Rath found in YBL (cols. 945–49). Marstrander (1911, 230) notes that MR II is clearly an “abridgement of several older and varying accounts” of the battle, drawn from more than one source, but the majority of lyrical exclamations concerning, for example, the fore-ordained victory of Domhnall mac Áeda, central to MR I, are omitted here, and it is unsurprising that reference to the martial prowess of the *maic Uislenn* as part of the florid list of Ulster's former champions is also absent.

Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne, 'The Wooing of Luaine and the death of Athairne'

This important tale, explored in greater detail in 3 2.4, below, recounts Conchobor's courtship of another woman after Deirdriu's death (Breatnach 1980; cf. Stokes 1903). Concurrent with his pursuit of the woman, named Lúaine, a boy described as the son of Noísiu and Deirdriu is brought to Ulster by his guardian Manannán mac Athgno, said to have fostered the child and his sister Aebgréiné after their parents' deaths. Manannán is also named as an ally of the *maic Uislenn* during the sixteen-year period of their exile in Scotland, when *ro gabsad o Manaind fothuaid don Alpain*, 'they conquered from Slamannan to the north of Alba', including the expulsion and killing of Gnathal mac Morgann, whose three sons sought refuge in Ulster and eventually slew Noísiu and his brothers *fri láim* ('as deputies of') Eogan mac Durthacht (id., 276). One of the sons of Gnathal is named as Maine Lámhgarbh, 'the rough-handed', also the name of the only warrior willing to assault the *maic Uislenn* at the end of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* (cf. 4 1.3.9, below). Mac Giolla Léith (1993, 16–17) has suggested that the reference to Maine Lámhgarbh within *Tochmarc Luaine*, acting as deputy for Eogan mac Durthacht, himself responsible for the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* within *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, indicates that the character was not simply the invention of the compiler of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* but was included within *Tochmarc Luaine* in an attempt to harmonize two independent accounts of the deaths of Noísiu and his brothers.¹⁴

1.3.3: In other manuscripts

Rawlinson B 502: 'The heroes of Emain Macha'

16 *Macne Uislenn, ard a ngus,*
maith a teglachus hi fus
reithitis caurach dar sal
Noisse is Aindle is Arddan.

“The descendants of Uisliu, noble their ferocity (?) good their household at home,
a coracle would flow across the sea, Noísiu and Ainnle and Ardán”.

This poem, attributed to the authorship of Mongán mac Fiachna, occurs in the second half of the

¹⁴ Liam Breatnach (1980, 4–6) also suggests that *Tochmarc Luaine* was compiled from several existing sources. The significance of this tale and its place within the corpus of material referring to Deirdriu is considered in greater detail at 3 2.4, below.

manuscript at folio 84va25 (Ó Cuív 2001, 199). The majority of Rawlinson B 502 dates from the mid-twelfth century, though alterations were still being made as lately as the 1700s (id., 174–81). It is unclear at which time the relevant poem may have been composed, and its meaning remains obscure. The reference to the coracle is of particular interest, given that, whilst it is commonly employed by characters within contemporary tales of exile, it does not appear to have been associated with the brothers' particular journey elsewhere. The couplet referring to the *maic Uislenn* also occurs in the section of the Laud Genealogies beginning *Cland Conchobor iterum* (Meyer 1912, 333).

Harleian 5280 folio 54a.e.1500s

This manuscript was compiled in the first half of the sixteenth century by Gilla riabach Ó Cléirigh (Flower 1926, 218). The relevant passage, forming an addendum to *Echtra Nerai* (Meyer 1890a, 210), is concerned with the “chronological relationship of Conaire Mór to various events of the [Ulster] cycle” (Flower 1926, 317). 'Conaire' is the anticipated answer to the question posed: *cia ba ri Erend oc i n-arbad mac n-Usnech*, 'who was king in Ireland [at the time of] the destruction of the sons of Uisneach'.¹⁵

Tochmarc Emire la Coinculaind, 'The wooing of Emer by Cuchulain'

Within this version of *Tochmarc Emire*, also found in Harleian 5280, folio 27r–35b (Flower 1926, 305–06), 'Noisse mac Uissneuch' is named as another recipient of training-in-arms from Scáthach (Meyer 1901, 250). It is also stated that the *tri maic ic Uslenn na n-ágh* ('of the weapons'), *Noisi*, *Ainnli* and *Ardán*, were present in Emain Macha when Cú Chulainn resumed leadership of Ulster after winning Emer's hand (id., 262).

The reference to the brothers is absent from the older version of *Tochmarc Emire* in Bodleian MS Rawlinson B 512 (folios 117a, 1–118a, 2). Although this manuscript was compiled not earlier than the fifteenth century (Ó Cuív 2001, 223, 230–32), Kuno Meyer has argued that the version of *Tochmarc Emire* it contains is at least three centuries older than the manuscript itself (1890b, 437–39). The addition to the list of Scáthach's pupils of characters whose prominence within the Ulster Cycle, notably for their martial prowess, increased in the period following the composition of the earlier version of *Tochmarc Emire* is by no means a surprise (cf. 5, below).

Annals of Loch Cé

Under the year 1581, one Brian MacDermot describes his condition whilst in mourning as 'like

¹⁵ The chronology of Conaire's reign also notes that *Táin Bó Flidais* took place at a similar time to the *echtra* of Nera (Meyer 1890a, 210), during which Fergus first arrived at Cruachan *a crích hUloith for luinguís*, 'from the land of Ulster as an exile' (Meyer 1899, 220 l.103).

Deirdre after the Sons of Uisneach had been treacherously slain in Emhain Mhacha [sic] by Conchobor [,] for I am melancholy, sorrowful, distressed and dispirited, in grief and in woe' (Fackler 1969, 58).

Duanaire Finn

Amongst many lays contained in this 'poem-book of Fionn', compiled 1626–27 (MacNeill 1908, xviii–xix), is an account of how the 'Sword of Oscar' was passed between the ownership of an extensive list of heroes. Classical characters and, later, native Irish warriors are included. After the sword has passed from Cú Chulainn to Fergus mac Róich, it is said that a warrior named Acoll came over the sea from Scotland with a great number of Irish hostages. The men of Ireland go to Cathbad at Tara to enquire which of them might be capable of slaying the invader, to which Cathbad replies: *ní ffuil a nEirinn ro fes acht aoínfer comlainn choisgfes*, 'there is not in Ireland, I know, but one combatant that will slay him' (MacNeill 1908, 53, l.77). The assembled warriors press for an answer, demanding to know whether the man will be Cú Chulainn, Fergus, Conall, several other men present, or *Naoise na n-arm n-áig*, 'Naoise [sic] of the weapons of battle' (id., 54, l.78).

Egerton 106

This manuscript contains the oldest extant copy (composed circa 1715) of a short tale entitled *Do Fogluim Chonculainn*, 'the training of Cuchulain' (Stokes 1908), also surviving in eight later manuscripts. The tale, based mainly upon events in the latter half of *Tochmarc Emire* (as above), describes Cú Chulainn's training-in-arms by Scáthach. Once again, 'Naoísi mac Uisnech' is described as a pupil of Scáthach's at the time of Cú Chulainn's arrival (Stokes 1908, 138, §57).¹⁶

1.3.4: *Dindsenchus*

Both Rudolf Thurneysen and R.A.S Macalister proposed topographical associations for the names of the *maic Uislenn* and, specifically, for their father, based mainly upon the "familiar and current place name *Uisnech*, genitive *Uisnig*, in West Meath (now Usney or Ushnagh Hill) [...]" (cited in Hull 1949, 7). Speculation concerning the effect of the *maic Uislenn* and Deirdriu upon the geographical landscape associated with their exploits is also found in relation to the various tales' Scottish episodes, i.e. during the exile of the party in that place:

"The children of Uisneach were likewise Cruithne, and must have preceded the Scots, for the great scene of their Scotch [sic] adventures are the districts of Lorn, Loch Aw, and Cowall, afterwards the possessions of the Dalriadic Scots; thus, in vicinity of Oban, we have Dun mhic Uisneachan, now

16 The list also includes Ferdiad mac Damhain and Lóit mór mac Mogha Feibhis, both of whom are described as pupils of Scáthach's by the Harleian version of *Tochmarc Emire* (as above) The relationship between *Do Fogluim Chonculainn* and the earlier versions of *Tochmarc Emire* is unclear, and outwith the scope of the present study, but this similarity, amongst the others noted by Meyer (1890b, 437–39), suggests that Naoísiu became associated with Scáthach only within later, i.e. post-*macgnímrada* material (cf. 5, below).

corruptly called in guidebooks Dun mac Sniachan, a fort with vitrified remains; and here we have on Loch Etive, Glen Uisneach, and Suidhe Deardhuil. The names of the three sons of Uisneach were Ainle, Ardan, and Naoise; and it is remarkable that Adomnán, in his life of St Columba, written in the seventh century, appears to mention only three localities in connexion with St Columba's journey to the palace of the king of the Picts, near Loch Ness, and these are Cainle, Arcardan and the flumen Nesae. Two vitrified forts in the neighbourhood of Loch Ness are [also] called Dundearduil" (McLauchlan and Skene 1862, lxxxi).

Whitley Stokes (1887, 121) commented that:

"It is just possible that some of this topography may be correct; but when Mr Skene connects Adamnán's *regio* or *mons Cainle* with the man's name Ainnle, and the river-name Nesa with the man's name Náisi [sic], and when he invents a place-name "Arcardan" in order to connect it with Ardán, he must excuse Celtic, and indeed all other, scholars for declining to follow him".

2: Editions/ literary treatments of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*

2.1: Geoffrey Keating and *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*

Completed sometime during the 1640s – but possibly as early as 1634 (Comyn 1902, xi; Cunningham 2000, 59) – Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* [FFE], the *History of Ireland*, remains the best-represented text of the Early Modern Irish period, copied and circulated in manuscript form barely five years after its completion (Cunningham 2000, 10). Its version of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* lacks a separate title,¹⁷ and forms part of Keating's description of the ongoing conflict between Ulster and Connacht during the reign of Ailill and Medb. Keating's text had a significant influence upon the development of material involving Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn* within the Early Modern period, with the majority of subsequent manuscript versions of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* including an introductory description of Deirdriu's existence prior to her sojourn in Scotland copied verbatim from Keating's text (Mac Giolla Leith 1993, 30–54). The text includes episodes not found within *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, suggesting that, whatever his sources, Keating approached the material with intentions differing greatly from those of previous redactors (cf. Cronin 1943–44, 1945–47; 4 1.3.10, below).

2.2: James Macpherson's 'Ossian' and *Dar-thula*

James Macpherson's *Dar-thula*, first published in 1762 as an accompaniment to *Fingal*, also had considerable impact upon subsequent depictions of Deirdriu, most especially during the years of the Irish Renaissance (cf. 2.6 & 2.7, below).

Howard Gaskill's edition of Macpherson's Ossianic works (1996) includes the marginal notations made by Macpherson upon his own working drafts, including those notes deleted in subsequent collections. Glossing the title of *Dar-thula*, Macpherson commented that "it may not be improper here, to give the story which is the foundation of this poem, as it is handed down by tradition"

¹⁷ It is designated 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach' by Osborn Bergin in his *Scéalaigheacht Chéitinn* (1930).

(1762, 167 n.1). The following synopsis bears little resemblance to *Longes mac n-Uislenn* or even to Keating's rendition within FFE, presenting a curious mixture of Ulster characters with those ordinarily belonging to the Fionn Cycle, e.g. Cairbar and Cormac. Dar-thula, daughter of Colla, lives at Seláma in Ulster, and is desired by the usurper king Cairbar whose advances she rejects. Meanwhile, three brothers, Nathos, Althos and Ardan, are sent by their father Usnoth from their home near Loch Eta in Argyllshire to Ulster, to learn arms from their uncle Cuchullin. Upon arrival, discovering that he has already fallen in battle, Nathos assumes the command of Cuchullin's army against Cairbar, and is also seen from afar by Dar-thula, who falls in love with him. The brothers attempt to return to Loch Eta, taking Dar-thula with them, following Cairbar's murder of the lawful king Cormac, but are driven back to Ireland by hostile winds and resume battle against Cairbar's army. Dar-thula is said to have taken up arms alongside the three brothers (a self-conscious note by Macpherson describes these as the arms of a very young man, quelling objections that Dar-thula would have been unable to wield them),¹⁸ but the brothers are felled by the arrows of Cairbar's men. Macpherson concludes:

"Her shield fell from Dar-thula's arm, her breast of snow appeared. It appeared, but it was stained with blood for an arrow was fixed in her side. She fell on the fallen Nathos, like a wreath of snow. Her dark hair spreads on his face, and their blood is mixing round" (1996, 147).

Macpherson acknowledges the deviation of this denouement "from the common tradition", but adds the remarkable comment that "[Ossian's] account is the most probable, as suicide seems to have been unknown in these early times: for no traces of it are found in the old poetry" (1762, 167 n.1) The name of his poem's heroine is etymologised as "Dar-thúla, or Dart' huile, *a woman with fine eyes*", who was "the most famous beauty of antiquity. To this day", claims Macpherson, "when a woman is praised for her beauty, the common phrase is, that *she is as lovely as Dar-thula*" (id., 452, n.12; author's italics). T. Travers Burke, in a note on his "English verse rendering" of Macpherson's poem, added that "Nathos signifies youthful, Ailthos [sic] exquisite beauty, Ardan, pure" (1820, 46). Of the several English-language renderings composed in the years following initial publication of Macpherson's poems, those including a version of *Dar-thula* made alterations to Macpherson's style of presentation, but little to his version's contents – Burke's account of Dar-thula's death, for example, differs barely from Macpherson's:

"Her gleaming shield dropt faintly from her hand:
The maiden's snowy bosom is descried;
But it, alas! with wandering blood is stain'd:
An arrow deep is fixed in her side!
She fell on Nathos, like a wreath of snow!
Her dark-brown hair is on his face wide-spread:
In mingling stream their blood around doth flow" (id., 38–9).

¹⁸ This note was omitted from the 1773 edition onwards; Gaskill 1996, 453, n.40.

Derick Thomson, evaluating Macpherson's working-methods and his attitude towards his source material, concluded that the author "made use of some fourteen or fifteen Gaelic ballads" in the course of his writings (1952, 10). In the case of *Dar-thula*, however, Thomson notes that although versions of a tale concerning Deirdriu or verses attributed to her appear in the collection of Archibald Fletcher (1750–60), and Edinburgh Adv. 72.2.12 (= NLS 62; Mackinnon 1912, 175) – both of which contain "some lines common to [*Dar-thula*]" – "there is no version of the [Deirdriu] story in the collections of Turner, MacNicol, Stone or MacLagan" (Thomson 1952, 54). Each of these collections date from the mid-eighteenth century, and may well have been utilised by Macpherson (id., 6–9). Thomson's conclusion tends to suggest that we should be less surprised by the lack of resemblance Macpherson's *Dar-thula* bears to any other earlier version, given that, whichever sources he may have consulted, the material has also "been adapted to fit in with Macpherson's own scheme of history" (id., 54). Thomson concludes that:

"Macpherson may be said to adapt his sources with some ingenuity, but in doing so he loses much of the story [...] The fine clear colours of the original are gone – we no longer see the red blood and the black raven against the whiteness of the snow.¹⁹ At times, indeed, the course of the story becomes hard to follow. In this telling the tale has lost its tragedy, its pathos, its dignity, and practically all its meaning" (id., 55).

J.F. Campbell (1872, 19) notes that *Dar-thula* is only "vaguely related to the traditional tale", and comments acerbically upon those persons who found credence in Macpherson's claims of 'Ossian's' authenticity: "the geography [of *Dar-thula*] is entirely changed. Upon this geography learned men found theories as to 'Selma' [Seláma] and 'Beregonium' and Vitriified Forts of the Stone Period, which the ignorant who speak Gaelic ignore".

2.3: Theophilus O'Flanagan's *Derdri*

O'Flanagan's compilation of material relating to Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn* was first published in 1808, and presents three variations upon the theme: the opening episodes of 'Marbhadh Chloinne Uisneach', Keating's interpretation of events from *Foras Feasa Ar Éirinn* (as 2.1, above); an account from an unattested manuscript, of similar content to the Glenmasan version as far as the exiles' return to Ulster (e.g. 'Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach'); and 'the ancient historic tale of the death of the children of Usnach', roughly equivalent to *Longes mac n-Uislenn* but with alterations made either by O'Flanagan or reflecting the variations in the manuscript from which his version was copied²⁰ from the accounts within LL, YBL and Egerton 1782. These

19 Professor Gillies, however, points out that within the description of Dar-thula's death alone (as above), the familiar three-colour symbolism is present in the blood falling from her wounded side, her dark hair spread upon Nathos's face, and the metaphor of her descent into his grave 'like a wreath of snow' (personal communication, August 2010).

20 According to Abbot and Gwynn (1921, 40, 42), agreeing with Eugene O'Curry, O'Flanagan's version of LMU derives from TCD H.1.6 (as 1.1.5, above). O'Curry noted, however, that O'Flanagan "without any explanations, took very great liberties with his text, in rejecting redundancies, supplying omissions, and changing the character of the orthography from the most modern commonplace to much more ancient forms" (1862, 378, cited in Mac

alterations include the substitution of several of the characters' names, such as 'Atchy' for Sencha mac Ailella, and the statement that during their first conversation Deirdriu threw a ball at Noisiu and snatched away the musical instrument he carried so that she might play it (O'Flanagan 1808, 146, 156).²¹

Inserted between the second and third accounts is O'Flanagan's diatribe against the inaccuracies of Macpherson's *Dar-thula*, and the liberties taken by its author with the Gaelic literary tradition (1808, 135–144). O'Flanagan's introductory proëme makes it clear that he considers Keating's version to have presented the “historical facts” of the case, based at least in part upon the “ancient document” his own text then reproduces (e.g. *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*; 1808, 11–12).

O'Flanagan also notes that his version of *Oidheadh Chloinne Uisneach* is taken from “a very fine old copy on vellum, acknowledged to have been written so long ago as the twelfth century” (1808, 137), now in the possession of the Highland Society following their investigations into Macpherson's authenticity (1805). This comment may refer to the Glenmasan manuscript itself, as the date ascribed corresponds to initial opinion regarding its composition circa 1238 (cf. 3.1, below). If this is the case, however, O'Flanagan's silence concerning the textual lacuna now found between two of the Glenmasan manuscript's pages is surprising (cf. 4 1.1.1, below), given the copious footnotes with which the rest of his text is strewn. It is possible that he is referring to another version of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* also in the possession of the Highland Society (e.g. one of those observed by Ewan Maclachlan in 1812; cf. 4 1.1.1, below), or else that O'Flanagan simply omits reference to the lacuna within his source, supplying its purported contents from elsewhere in the manner of several more recent editors (cf. 4 1.2, below). In the latter case, however, as noted above, we might have expected some indication of the manuscript's deficiencies, akin to those observed by Donald Smith and Lord Bannatyne during the Highland Society's investigation of Macpherson (cf. 4 1.1.1, below). It is necessary to conclude, therefore, that were O'Flanagan's ‘Highland Society’ source the Glenmasan manuscript itself, it had not yet suffered the loss of its central bifolium at the time at which he examined it (cf. 4 1.1.1, below).

Whilst O'Flanagan's editorial efforts were clearly intended to highlight the perceived shortcomings of *Dar-thula*, referred to more than once as a “monstrous fabrication” (e.g. 1808, 143), his compilation constitutes the first attempt following Geoffrey Keating's to assemble a cohesive and chronological version of the varying accounts of Deirdriu's relationship with the

Giolla Léith 1993, 49).

21 Several other variations clearly reflect O'Flanagan's personal interference, e.g. the statement that, upon the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, Deirdriu spent a year 'in the bed' of Conchobor, when the Irish reads only *hi fail*, 'in the company of', as in LL, etcetera (1808, 166–67).

maic Uislenn.

2.4: Eugene O'Curry's *Trí Truaige na Scélaigheachta*

O'Curry's translation in *The Atlantis* (1862) was based upon the text of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* in YBL, describing the prophecy made by Cathbad following Deirdriu's birth (id., 398–401), Deirdriu's secluded upbringing (401–1), and her meeting with Noísiu and their subsequent departure from Ulster in the company of Ainnle and Ardán (402–4). The period of time spent in Scotland elapses before the exiled party are lured back to Ulster by Conchobor's false promises of reconciliation (402–5), as a result of which Noísiu and his brothers are slaughtered before Emain Macha and Deirdriu is returned to Conchobor's custody (406–9). A year later her death occurs when, following her leap from a moving chariot, *do leigi a cend immon cloich, conderna brulig dia chind, combo marb*, 'she dashed her head against the stone, so that her head was shattered to pieces, so that she was dead.' (408).

O'Curry's text, as one of the most accessible English-language versions of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, was greatly influential to presentations of Deirdriu and the three brothers during the period of the Irish Renaissance (cf. 2.6, below).

2.5: John Francis Campbell's *Leabhar na Féinne*

J.F. Campbell's *Leabhar na Féinne* (1872) comprises over 400 Gaelic poems, ballads and verse fragments “copied from old manuscripts preserved at Edinburgh and elsewhere, and from rare books; and orally collected since 1859” (frontispiece). It contains material from the *Book of the Dean of Lismore* down to the results of Campbell's own research during the 1860s. Collections utilised by Campbell which include material concerning Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn* are summarised thus (id., 19): “[the first collected] by Mr Hector Mac Lean. Fletcher got a version in Scotland from oral recitation around 1750. Gillies printed part of the story in 1786. Irvine got part of the verse, about 1801, from a foxhunter on Loch Tayside. Stewart [in] 1804 printed a version”. Also noted is the quotation printed in the *Report of the Highland Society on the Authenticity of Ossian's Poems* (1805)²², and a ballad entitled 'Duan na Cloinn' “written in Caithness from the dictation of Betty Sutherland, [which] I have been unable to get, but the name indicates this story” (ibid.) Campbell's own summary of “the story, as I had learned it in Scotland”, runs thus:

²² This is the poem beginning *Inmain tír in tír-ud thoir*, numbered i) in the edition of Mac Giolla Léith (1993, 27). Irvine's verses, entitled 'Deirdre no Clann Uisnachan' by Campbell, are introduced by a note to the effect that the heroine's name is therein “Tirfail, not Dearduil [sic]. It seems a different poem altogether from Macpherson's Darthula [sic]; only the names of three brothers are the same [...] One is at a loss whether the poet gives two names, or whether the poem is a part of two poems”.

“King Connachar, of Ireland, had a sister, whose three sons, Naois, Ardan, and Ainle, ran off with Deirdre, their uncle's sweetheart. They went to Scotland, where they wandered about, chiefly in Argyllshire, according to the [place] names. At last the brothers left Deirdre, in charge of a black-haired lad, in an island, which is identified with a small islet north of Jura, in which are ecclesiastical remains. This character is made steward of the King of Scotland in written versions. The black lad made love to Deirdre. The brothers, in three ships, returned just in time to save her, and told her their adventures. They had been imprisoned in 'Lochlann' or elsewhere, and rescued by a king's daughter. They all embarked, Deirdre sang a lament for Scotland, and foreboded evil from dreams. They reached Ireland, and after a grand battle the uncle slew the nephews, who had run away with his sweetheart. She bewailed them, and died upon their bodies”.²³

2.6: Deirdriu during the Revival

Few characters from the medieval Irish literary pantheon inspired such systematic interest and recreation during the period of the Revival as Deirdriu. More than twenty tales, plays and epic poems were produced, at least purportedly based upon her biographical portrayal within LMU.²⁴ As one delighted author wrote, “the name of Deirdre has been as a lamp to a thousand poets” (MacLeod 1903, 4). Yet her popularity during the Revival as a focus for creative endeavour, alongside ruminations upon Noísiu's beauty and prowess, Conchobor's jealousy or his volatile Ulster court, are of such diversity as to deter the suggestion that writers choosing to pursue these themes were influenced by LMU as a common origin or source text. The Deirdre of Lady Gregory's interpretation in her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902), for instance, obtains a knife from a passing fisherman several paragraphs before it is utilised in a scene of calm deliberation, driven into her heart by her own hand and flung into the sea, so that no one but herself might be blamed (Gregory, 1902, 139–40). Although the difficulties of depicting Deirdre's death on-stage in the manner of LMU itself may be understood – the script of Yeats's 1907 play, for example, contains the direction that her demise, also the result of a self-inflicted knife-wound, occurs behind a convenient curtain (1982, 201; cf. Stelmach 2007, 158–9) – such obstacles do not also impede the composer of a written text. How else, then, may the diverse natures of the Deirdres produced during the Revival years be accounted for?

Questioning the variation of twentieth-century treatments of Deirdriu's character from her portrayal within a text whose oldest-surviving example pre-dates the twelfth, is not to deny the effect of an individual author's desire for creativity, nor the fact that stories of every kind are continuously retold, and familiar characters recast, resulting in significantly different characterisation from version to version. Yet mere creative vagary does not satisfactorily explain the reasons why, for depictions of Deirdriu's association with Ulster such as those produced by

²³ Spellings throughout this summary reflect Campbell's text.

²⁴ An incomplete list of adaptations may be found in Miyake 1999, 1250ff. (less reliable, for example, with regard to critical translations, e.g. the inexplicable omission of Stokes 1887. Roughly thirty works, both critical and literary, were composed from 1881–1921, the chief period of the Revival in terms of political and cultural development [cf. O'Leary 1994, 16]).

Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats (1982), Synge (1910), AE (1907),²⁵ James Stephens (1923), Samuel Ferguson (1907) and several other Revivalist writers, no single source may be identified as a common influence. In a recent article, Kathryn Stelmach suggests that Deirdriu's portrayal during the Revival was inextricably bound up with her politically symbolic status as a "figure of disunity", whose story "offered a foundational and post-lapsarian myth for the Irish nation, presenting an aetiology for the contentious history of Ireland and exploring the danger and deliverance inherent in undermining contractual obligations and fealty to a patriarchal sovereign power" (2007, 143; cf. Herbert 1992). Contrary to this potential symbolism, Stelmach also suggests that Revivalist writers inspired by LMU then "neglected the opportunity to reconfigure Deirdre as an alternative and subversive sovereignty figure, as a revolutionary who undermines the authority of a colonizing Conchobor" (id., 144), choosing to "transform the tragic heroine into a figure of revivalist aspirations and mythical proportions: the child of a storyteller who remains self-conscious about her fame and posterity, exerting control not only over her life but also over her rebirth in literary tradition" (id., 145). It is apparent that Yeats and Synge, in particular, eschewing the visceral depiction of Deirdriu's shattered skull at the close of her life, weave themes pertaining to ephemeral beauty and the contrasting longevity of literary fame throughout their respective plays. Yet Stelmach makes no distinction between the separate traditions concerning Deirdriu's death within OCU as opposed to LMU. Moreover, whilst questioning the general availability of Revivalist authors' sources, notably LMU in its medieval Irish form, Stelmach fails to explore the potentially greater influence of English-language texts focused upon Deirdriu – a significant omission given that many Anglo-Irish writers of the period possessed no competence in the Irish language.²⁶

For those authors, notably W. B. Yeats, accessible English-language translations were of paramount importance. English versions of material containing some form of a Deirdre-figure date from Macpherson's *Dar-thula* of 1765, followed by O'Flanagan's *Derdri* in 1808 (as above). Samuel Ferguson also published, in English, a literal rendition of Deirdre's final lament for the *maic Uislenn* in 1834 (Fackler, 1969, 57). Apart from Macpherson, however, whose popularity may be discerned from fervent dedications made to his work by several Revivalist writers (e.g. Graham, 1908; Macdonnell, 1912), the most influential English-language version of material describing Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn* was O'Curry's translation of LMU from YBL (cf. 2.4, above). His article in *The Atlantis* was recommended by Yeats to Lady Gregory, then in the process of gathering material to assist her composition of the chapter dealing with Deirdriu in

25 Pseudonym of George Russell (fl. 1867–1935).

26 The exceptions were Standish Hayes O'Grady, Synge, Lady Gregory and Douglas Hyde. Synge's grasp of Irish was sufficient to have made an at least partial English translation of the Irish text from the Society for the Protection of the Irish Language [SPIL] edition of *Oidhe Chloinne Uisnigh* (1898); Stelmach 2007, 146–48, and nn. 15 and 21; cf. Herbert 1991, 13.

Cuchulain of Muirthemne (Kelly and Schuchard 1994, 136).²⁷ Although O'Curry's editorial principles were sparsely defined, despite his criticism of this deficit in works such as O'Flanagan's *Derdri*, his justification for publishing another version of the Irish material was sympathetic to later claims of Revivalist writers that, prior to his own revision, a "true representation of the original" could not be found in accessible format – that is to say, in English (O'Curry 1862, 377–78; cf. Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 49).

In addition to the main section of LMU from YBL (as 1.1.3, above), O'Curry's text also included two separate accounts describing the situation in Ulster following the deaths of Deirdriu and Noísiu. Defined by O'Curry as 'fragmentary', the first of these descriptions, occurring later within YBL itself (cols 880–1) and also in the *Book of Ballymote* (fo.141), is actually part of *Tochmarc Luaine agus Aided Athairne* (cf. 3 2.4, below), but O'Curry makes no connection between the conclusion of LMU, i.e. Deirdriu's death, and the statement at the beginning of the alleged fragment that Conchobor has lacked a woman since the time her death occurred. O'Curry's fragment/ the extract from *Tochmarc Luaine* describes a son and daughter, Gaíar and Aebgréiné, born to Deirdriu and Noísiu during the period of their exile in Scotland. The existence of these offspring, also noted within the *Bansenchus* ('The History of the Women of Ireland'; Dobbs, 1931, 209), goes unnoticed by the earliest version of LMU in LL and by the main text of YBL, which, as we have seen, also concludes with Deirdriu's demise (O'Curry, 1862, 416–17). According to *Tochmarc Luaine*, Deirdriu's children remain in Scotland following their parents' return to Ulster until Gaíar, some little time later, is brought to Conchobor's fort at Emain Macha under the guidance of Manannán mac Athgno, who has fostered the brother and sister in exile (id., 418–19).²⁸ A treaty of peace is made with Conchobor, from whose honour-price the deaths of Ainnle and Ardán are removed, and Gaíar is granted his father's *éraic* (id., 420), a fixed penalty of seven cumals due in payment by the perpetrator of an unlawful killing (Kelly 1988, 126). The second account printed by O'Curry, from TCD H.3.17, also states that Gaíar, a son of Noísiu, assumed the kingship of Ulster for a year after banishing Conchobor to Orkney, but returned it voluntarily before resuming his former residency in Eamhain Abhlach (Arran) with Manannan mac Lir. This text, part of a 'tract on the filiations of Clann Rudhraigé', adds that Deirdriu's daughter, Aebgréiné, married Rinn mac Echaid Iuil, son of a king of the otherworld

27 Yeats initially appears to have learned of the article's existence from William Sharp ('Fiona Macleod'); Kelly and Schuchard 1994, 141.

28 Four Manannáns are mentioned within *Tochmarc Luaine*. Stokes (1903, 274, 276) was the first editor to include the "lengthy interpolation which [otherwise] marring [sic] its continuity", omitted by Atkinson (1880a) and by O'Curry himself in a revised version of the *Atlantis* article (1873, 373). It is, however, probable that the author of *Tochmarc Luaine* had hoped to make sense of existing confusion concerning which of four known Manannáns fostered Noísiu's children, by including this differentiation between the other three. Manannán mac Lir, as the most famous of the four, is frequently confused with Manannán mac Athgno in later texts, such as the fragment within H.3.17.

(1862, 420).²⁹

Despite the accessibility of O'Curry's text as an English-language source, however, and his convenient inclusion of material extraneous to the base narrative of LMU, his translation cannot be held accountable for all subsequent disparity between interpretations of Deirdriu's character by Revivalist writers, and the earliest versions of LMU. Although O'Curry acknowledges no editorial principles, beyond stating that the text of YBL was preferred to that of LL due to its "more correct" grammar (1862, 378), his translation offers a fairly literal rendition of the Irish text, with no interpolation of material to the tale-structure of the YBL text other than the appended sections from *Tochmarc Luaine*, which are acknowledged as such (cf. 2.4, above). Moreover, despite Yeats's familiarity with O'Curry's text, his admiration of, for example, the Deirdres of Samuel Ferguson and Standish Hayes O'Grady is also recorded,³⁰ in addition to his awareness, at least, of the scholarly edition of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* produced by Whitley Stokes in 1887.³¹ O'Curry's treatment of his source material, however, should be considered representative of the general editorial attitude of Revivalist writers towards the tales with which they worked, whether these were translations into English other than his, or texts in the original language. Yeats's opinion of the way in which traditional material ought to be regarded by modern writers was expressed in his preface to Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*:

"Few of the [traditional] stories really begin to exist as great works of imagination until somebody has taken the best bits out of many manuscripts. Sometimes, as in Lady Gregory's version of *Deirdre*, a dozen manuscripts have to give their best before the beads are ready for the necklace. It has been necessary also to leave out as to add, for generations of copyists, who had often but little sympathy with the stories they copied, have mixed versions together in a clumsy fashion" (1902, ix).

T. W. Rolleston also advocated this kind of tampering with manuscript material, stating that "we want the Irish spirit, certainly [...] but we want its gold, not its dross; its spirituality not its superstition; its daring fancy, not its frequent recourse to mechanical exaggeration" (cited in Marcus 1970, 72). Asserting his own, and others', right to alter source material in whichever way might seem appropriate, Rolleston's attitude also suggests that Revivalist writers undertaking revisions of traditional material may have done so partly with the intention of correcting

29 He is mentioned as one of three Otherworld kings hostile to Fand within *Serglige Con Culann*, killed by Cú Chulainn's spear-cast as he bathes (Dillon 1953, ll.589–91).

30 Like Ferguson's *Lays of the Red Branch* (offering yet another interpretation to the version in his *Hibernian Nights' Entertainments* [1887, 16]), Yeats's Deirdre play focuses solely upon the final hour of Deirdriu's and Noísiu's lives (Yeats 1970, 81–7).

31 A copy of Stokes's edition was given by Douglas Hyde to Lady Gregory, who seems to have shared most of her sources with Yeats; Rohan 1988, 37 and n.8. An edition of OCU from the Glenmasan manuscript was produced by Donald Mackinnon between 1904 and 1908 (cf. 3.4, below), but there is no evidence to suggest it was known to Yeats's circle (it was published too late to have been part of the "bundle" of books presented to Lady Gregory by Douglas Hyde in 1901, during her collection of sources to inform *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* [Pethica 1996, 305; see below]). It is, however, possible that she was aware of Mackinnon's existing work upon the subject, some examples of which had been published during the 1890s [e.g. Mackinnon 1890]).

perceived errors committed upon the earliest texts by previous editors, or even the original compilers of manuscripts such as LL and YBL. An attitude of this sort also implies that untreated material was considered inaccessible to the reading public, without the assistance of intermediaries willing to wrestle with the neglected, even abused manuscript descent of the content of the original stories in their purest form. Lady Gregory, for example, embarking upon the project which became *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, wrote in her journal that “I have had an idea floating in my mind for some time that I might put together the Irish legends, into a sort of *Morte d'Arthur*, choosing only the most beautiful or striking” (Pethica 1996, 290). Subsequent comments upon various stages of the developing project also suggest her personal view of its ultimate objectives. Gathering material in the British Museum in January 1901, she notes that “with a little alteration”, Alexander Carmichael's *Deirdire* “will fit on very well” to the sources already discovered” (id., 301).³² Douglas Hyde had also sent her some later versions of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*, including “a bundle of 'Trische Texte' and other books – and an MS that I'm afraid I can't read” (id., 305).³³ Hyde's assistance, notably the gift of a well-regarded academic translation (Stokes's 'Death of the Sons of Uisneach' [1887]), may suggest that he hoped to influence the format of the completed project, concerning which, when first apprised of its conception in 1900, he had expressed disapproval. Lady Gregory's account of this conversation is clear about the reasons for Hyde's concerns: “[he] rather snubs my idea of harmonising Cuchulain – I think his feeling is a scholar sh[ou]ld do it – and he is bewildered at my simple translations”. One of these, she notes later on, had been translated first from English into Irish, then back again “literally into English – [but] 'of course an epic should not be translated in colloquial style' [Hyde] says, which accounts for his translations of epic bits being heavy and formal” (Pethica 1996, 293). To another critic, Sidney Colvin, who commented that “the difficulty about harmonising is that there are so many different stories”, Lady Gregory replied, “yes, that is just why it is necessary” (id., 301).

The desire to impose harmony upon perceived disorder, and also to frame the results in a style other than Hyde's “heavy and formal” presentation, suggests that, for Lady Gregory at least, her foremost principle of composition was the creation of a ‘good story’. By her own definition, the ‘good’ story is a complete one, with no absent narrative details likely to frustrate the natural curiosity of her audience. The ‘good story’ approach followed Standish Hayes O'Grady's principles of construction in his *History of Ireland*, concerning which Philip Marcus commented that:

32 Such a comment also suggests that she drew little distinction between written materials in Irish and Carmichael's version of the tale, which had not only been acquired by oral collection, but was presented in the Scottish Gaelic of Hebridean Uist (.

33 She neglects to mention whether this was due to the condition of the manuscript, or should be taken to indicate a limitation in her understanding of Old or Middle Irish.

“[O’Grady was] concerned with the aesthetic values of the legendary tales and sought to enhance them. In his method, as he himself described it, ‘actual historical fact’ was ‘seen through an imaginative medium’ and the whole of the original account reduced to its ‘artistic elements’. This was essentially the ‘good story’ approach, and he used it fully, adding as well as omitting. He introduced not only descriptive passages and details for creating atmosphere, but elements of characterisation and even, on occasion, whole incidents. The degree of freedom he allowed himself is indicated by the episode in which he depicted Cuchulain and Láeg visiting Dublin on Christmas [Eve] and seeing there in a shop window a shiny toy chariot, which they buy for Cuchulain’s small son” (Marcus 1970b, 237).

Alice Macdonnell, a contemporary of Lady Gregory, noted that “her aim [was] to give the complete story from the best sources” (1912, 354 n.1), tacitly implying the fragmentary nature of several of the sources to which she refers. In a tale depicting events within the life of Deirdriu, therefore, narrative completeness requires that a description of each significant event pertaining to her life is included, from birth to death and all remarkable moments in between. If Yeats’s metaphor is borrowed here, we may consider the construction of each new tale, or necklace, as the careful selection and polishing of an existing source, or bead, which supplies the most sparkling description of Deirdriu’s birth, the conditions of her upbringing, her elopement, or her time in exile, and so on until the bead depicting her death concludes the strand. Should a particular bead fail to be discovered amongst those of an existing necklace – an older text such as O’Curry’s edition of YBL – then it might be sought from another text or, alternatively, modelled afresh, with the absent bead supplied by the author. The beads of Lady Gregory’s Deirdriu necklace, for example, appear to have been taken from the sources supplied by Hyde, from Stokes’s ‘Death of the Sons of Uisneach’ in *Irish Texts*, from Carmichael’s *Deirdre*, and from O’Curry’s translation of the YBL text of LMU, with an additional sparkle given to each bead in the manner of its presentation. Given, however, that O’Curry’s text offered not only a whole range of beads from which descriptions of Deirdriu’s birth, her upbringing and so forth might be selected, but also thoughtfully supplied the possibility of describing events following hers and Noísiu’s deaths, its popularity with Lady Gregory and Yeats in particular is easy to comprehend. The fact that the union of Deirdriu and Noísiu, prior to its untimely conclusion, could be said to have produced children, suggested not only narrative completeness but also the ultimate humanity of the characters involved, whose literary legacy could also be seen to have flourished outwith the boundaries of the tales by which they were first defined. Yeats, for example, advised Lady Gregory that including a description of the couple’s offspring would “improve the tale of Deirdre by giving one a better and fuller feeling of her married life in Scotland”, adding that, in his opinion, ‘Deirdre is the kind of woman who should have children... [she] is the normal, compassionate, wise house-wife lifted into immortality by beauty and tragedy. Her feeling for her lover is the feeling of the house-wife for the man of the house’ (Kelly and Schuchard 1994, 144–

The presentation of material relating to Deirdriu's and Noísiu's children, absent from both LL and YBL, also illustrates what appears to have been a second preoccupation of writers working with traditional material during the years of the Revival, in addition to the desire to harmonize the contents of a wide range of disparate texts. This is the propensity for speculation concerning events either outwith the span of a single source as it stands or, equally, the expansion of episodes within that source whose current form provided insufficient detail about the course of the event described or its effect upon the characters concerned. The suggestion that, during their time in exile, Deirdriu gave birth to Noísiu's children embellished an existing aspect of the basic tale at the same time as allowing for speculation regarding the children's own future experience to be entertained. From the "economy" of extraneous detail provided by the text of LMU within LL, a subsequent desire for creative expansion may be understood (Hull 1949, 1). Who, for instance, was Deirdriu's mother, nameless and unremarked upon by LL and YBL (likewise in later versions of OCU),³⁵ but invested with considerable detail by Revivalist writers? John Todhunter's poem, for example, underlines the unease surrounding Deirdriu's birth by describing the contemporaneous passing of her mother, before nurses present the child to its father with the words, "Thy dead wife sends thee this" (cited in Miyake 1999, 507). The general subject of the youthful Deirdriu's maternal relationships, with both Leborcham and a second nurse named Medb, formed a substantial part of a 1904 play by Michael Field (1918). Treatments of the tale by several other authors of the period dealt with, variously, Deirdriu's spiritual or psychological awareness of Noísiu's beauty long before his existence was actually known to her (AE 1907, 16; Hyde 1899, 145–50);³⁶ her delicate religious affinities (Gore-Booth 1930; Macdonnell 1912, 353); as well as extensive speculations concerning the first meeting of the couple and their

34 My interpretation of 'literary legacy' differs from Stelmach's (2007, *passim*), whose extensive exploration of the concept of immortality within the Deirdre plays of Yeats and Synge does not consider why mention of Deirdriu's and Noísiu's children was omitted. That Yeats chose not to include them in his own play, despite his lengthy correspondence with Lady Gregory upon the subject, actually confirms Stelmach's contention that the humanity he had recommended for Lady Gregory's interpretation was rejected in favour of a strictly literary memorial to Deirdre's and Noísiu's love, predicated on the memory of its tragic conclusion being preserved for successive generations in song; e.g. Yeats's Deirdre says to the chorus of assembled musicians: 'For being but dead we shall have many friends./ All through your wanderings, the doors of kings /shall be thrown wider open [...] because you are wearing this [a bracelet given to the musicians' leader] /to show that you have Deirdre's story right' (1982, 194; cf. Rohan 1988, 49, and 2004, xxxii. Stelmach notes that Yeats's Deirdre "gives her bracelet to one of the musicians, [as] a relic that underscores her desire to be venerated as the story expands concentrically throughout the world, as well as her generosity to purveyors of art"; 2007, 158).

35 Which, despite extensive descriptions of events following the return of Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn* to Ulster, do not address what occurred either before or after the party's exile (as Mac Giolla Léith has noted, 'about 85%' of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* is concerned with events which comprise a mere 28 of the 320 lines of [Hull's] edition of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* [1993, 15]).

36 Hyde's Irish text, probably dating from the late-eighteenth-century, was taken from a manuscript in the hand of one Samuel Bryson, and appears to be unique, although Hyde also dutifully lists six other previous editors of the LL/ YBL and later Early Modern texts (1899, 138–39). Hyde's previous interpretation of Deirdriu's character, published four years earlier, was not introduced with any such terms of justification, and may be regarded as entirely creative; Miyake 1999, 473–503.

subsequent elopement (Hyde, cited in Miyake 1999, 356; Ferguson 1887, 16; Graham 1908, 37; Gavan 1892, 25; R. Joyce, cited in Miyake 1999, 307ff.).³⁷

In addition to the harmonization of disparate sources, or addressing the perceived carelessness of previous editors and scribes, a further aim of Revivalist writers working with traditional material appears to have been the clarification of aspects of the earlier tales which might now prove perplexing for a modern audience. The significance, for example, of Leborcham's role as satirist within LMU, whose privileged status ensures that she cannot be prevented from visiting Deirdriu during her otherwise isolated youth (ll.88–9), required an understanding of the honour-based codes of the Early Irish legal system, which defined the negatively-spoken word as one of the most immediate and severe ways to besmirch a person's personal status (Kelly 1988, 42–43; Ó Cathasaigh 1986). Leborcham cannot be excluded for fear that she will utter an indictment upon the upbringing of the secluded Deirdriu, whose isolation draws to a close from the moment that Noísiu's existence is brought to her attention by the satirist (LMU ll.97–9). As a less-ambiguous instrument in the courtship of Deirdriu and Noísiu, for the modern audience, her role is filled by an alternative intermediary, such as Yeats's avaricious hunter, who reveals the whereabouts of the beautiful girl he has glimpsed in the woods in anticipation of a generous reward (1982, 108–09).

The episode in which Deirdriu and Noísiu first encounter each other was also thought to require elucidation. In LMU (ll. 109–122) Deirdriu, having heard Noísiu singing with the famous tenor voice (*andord*) of the *maic Uislenn*, steals out of her enclosure (*les*) and informs him that in a choice between the “bull of the province” (*tarb in chóicid*, Conchobor) and the “young bullock” (*tarbín óag*, Noísiu), she would choose him instead of Conchobor. When Noísiu expresses concern that the *tarb in chóicid* has already chosen Deirdriu for himself, and refuses to acknowledge that she is capable of autonomous decisions outwith this existing limitation, she grasps him by his two ears and utters the words, *dá n-ó méle ocus cuitbiuda in-so [...] manimbera-su lat*, ‘two ears of shame and of derision these [...] unless you take me away with you,’ (l.120; cf. 3 2.2.3). Whilst the exact nature of the phenomenon invoked by Deirdriu with these actions is unclear, the inescapable situation in which Noísiu is placed as a result indicates to the audience the intricacies of an honour-based social system. Failure to accede to Deirdriu's request, given the manner in which it has been couched, will result in the impugning of his personal honour through “shame and derision”, yet to abscond with the woman already chosen by Conchobor in order to avoid this stigma is not only to outrage the honour due to him as chief of

37 Robert's brother, Patrick Joyce, published *Old Celtic Romances* in 1892, omitting all mention of the elopement from the chapter dealing with Deirdre's and Noísiu's relationship, taking the fatality of their involvement with each other to be of such inevitability that it did not require description (id., 216).

the province, but also to flout Noísiu's personal obligations of loyalty to Conchobor as his overlord. Fortunately for the Revivalist writers seeking to interpret this highly complex episode, Noísiu's additional reference to the prophecy cast by Cathbad earlier within LMU (ll.30–79, 116), allowed for the tragically romantic aspect of ill-fated, foreordained inevitability to be emphasised in place of a vexed reference to long-obsolete honour codes. Not only was Deirdriu's meeting with Noísiu taken to have been inevitable, despite – or, perhaps, because of – each obstacle to its inception, but the conclusion was also deliciously predestined, even for those Revivalist authors who had not found it necessary to introduce the justification of Cathbad's prophecy into an earlier part of their text. Residual suggestions of coercion within the couple's first exchange are reduced to mere persuasive entreaty, Deirdriu presenting Noísiu with a red rose (Macdonnell 1912, 356), or some other type of foliage as a token of her regard (Macleod 1903, 37).³⁸

Yet another factor is relevant to the presentation of Deirdriu during this period. The careful attempts of Revivalist, mostly non-Irish-speaking authors, to deal with the intricate nature of Early and Early Modern Irish material was not conducted in isolation, but within the wider context of contemporaneous attempts to promote Gaelic language and literature, in Modern Irish, by organisations such as the Gaelic League and the Society for the Protection of the Irish Language [SPIL]. Decisions facing Yeats, Lady Gregory and their Anglo-Irish contemporaries, regarding the difficulties of presenting adapted material to a modern audience, were also being faced by those Gaelic-speaking counterparts concerned with the substantial variation between colloquial Modern Irish and the language of manuscripts such as LL and YBL. It was a discouraging fact, acknowledged by even the more vehement members of the Gaelic League such as An tAthair Peadar Úa Laoghaire and D.P. Moran, that however much they might emphasise that the spirit of Early Irish literature was inaccessible through the English language, even for many speakers of Modern Irish the language of the older manuscripts like LL was as challenging to decipher unaided as if they had been composed in an entirely foreign tongue. For Yeats, this dichotomy was viewed as a problem of secondary importance to maintaining a faithful portrayal of the spirit of the ancient tales, no matter whether the language of the rendition was Irish or English. In 1892, in an article in *United Ireland* entitled 'The De-Anglicising of Ireland', he opined that “when we remember the majesty of Cuchullin [sic] and the beauty of sorrowing Deirdre we should not forget that it is that majesty and that beauty which are immortal, and not the perishing tongue that first told of them” (cited in Marcus 1970b, 17). Yeats's indifference to the linguistic decline was not shared by adherents of the Gaelic League and the SPIL, such as the anonymous author of a letter published in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, outlining the frustration of many who believed that contemporary language movements faced a stark choice between

38 In this case, however, the presentation of the flower retains symbolic status as a mark of the shame Noísiu will be exposed to if he does not concede to the elopement.

fostering accessibility to literature composed in Irish, via the medium of English translations, or ceasing to promote older Irish literature at all:

“Ní féidir linn sean-teanga na hÉireann d’fhoghlaim – tá obair ár ndóithin againn agus an teanga nuadh-dhéanta do choimeád beo – mar gheall air sin ní féidir linn na sean-sgeulta do léigheadh acht as leabhraibh Beurla amháin. Nach mór an náire é sin?” (“We can’t learn the ancient language of Ireland – we have enough work keeping the modern language alive. Therefore, we can only read the ancient stories out of books in English – isn’t that a shame?” O’Leary 1994, 232).

Despite awareness of this difficulty, uncompromising members of the League claimed that not only did the earliest tales in Irish represent literature uncontaminated by foreign, specifically Norman-English influences, but that the content of this pure Gaelic material should be promoted as an inspiration for reasoned racial pride among the modern Gael, freshly reminded of the deeds of his ancestors. English-language versions of these tales, in spite of their grudgingly-admitted convenience, undermined claims to a “unique spiritual continuity with the Irish past” (O’Leary 1992, 464). Both parties, despite the disparity of their methods, may have agreed upon the importance of adjusting Early Irish material for the perceived needs of a modern audience, but mounting nervousness at the popularity of Anglo-Irish, English-language adaptations of early tales, such as *LMU*, may be seen in statements like Eoin Mac Néill’s barbed praise of Lady Gregory, following the appearance of *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*:

“a few more books like it, and the Gaelic League will want to suppress you on a double indictment, to wit, depriving the Irish language of her sole right to express the innermost Irish mind, and secondly, investing the Anglo-Irish language with a literary dignity it has never hitherto possessed” (O’Leary 1994, 287–88; cf. Smythe 1974, 402).

The reviewer of *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* in the *Leader* also opined that “[it] will do a temporary good, but we may trust that in ten or twenty years it will be regarded as entirely out of date, or as possessing a sort of historical interest as a specimen of the contrivances that served a purpose as Ireland returned from the desert” (O’Leary 1994, 294). More vehement objections, however, were not unknown, such as the hostile reaction to Yeats’s casting, in 1907, of the English actress Mrs Patrick Campbell in the role of Deirdre at the Abbey Theatre.³⁹

Yet, despite the misgivings of Gaelic Leaguers and their supporters, attempts to address the disparity between Modern Irish and the language of the earliest tales were markedly similar to the adjustments made by Revivalist authors to their English-language translations. Ulster Cycle and Fenian tales were paraphrased into Modern Irish, with just as little heed paid to the content and format of the alleged source, and still less to the requirements of their potential audience. Philip

39 Another disgruntled *An Claidheamh Soluis* columnist wrote, in November 1907, that “ag dul i nGalltacht atá an Irish Literary Theatre, is baoghlach. Níl cluicheoirí Gall-Ghaedhealach sáthach Gallda aca anois. Caithfidh siad fíor-Ghaill a thabhairt anall as Lonndain”, ‘it is to be feared that the Irish Literary Theatre is becoming [even] more Anglicised. Their Anglo-Irish actors are not sufficiently English now. They have to bring real English people over from London’; O’Leary 1994, 316.

O'Leary has noted that whereas collections of translated tales such as *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* were composed with purposeful objectives in mind, contributions to the growing canon of Modern Irish literature, including translated material, were produced in an almost arbitrary fashion, with authors writing “what they felt they should or could”, with little consideration of who was likely to read the results (1994, 12–13).⁴⁰ The content of an older Irish tale translated into the Modern tongue was just as likely to reflect the personal interpretation of its new editor as the perspective of the original. Even at An tOireachtas, the annual festival of the Gaelic League, the directive for the category of ‘best modernized version of a tale or episode from Old or Middle Irish’, introduced in 1900, was emended twice, once from the committee's initial intention to direct entrants to material pre-dating the sixteenth century (O'Leary 1992, 479 n.9), and again to stipulate that departures from the original plot of an early tale would be acceptable where “greater artistic success had already been achieved [by the departure]”. Certain entries were even criticised for too-close fidelity to the original, presumably because it denoted a lack of artistic endeavour on the part of the writer (O'Leary 1992, 466). At the 1909 festival, one entry in this category was an early example of a Modern Irish play based on LMU.⁴¹ Composed by Tomás Ó Ceallaigh (1909), the salient characteristic of the play is its focus upon the staunchly Irish identities of the main characters, including Deirdriu, who, whilst in exile and offered marriage by the king of Scotland, rejects his wealth on the grounds that she would rather be poor than exiled from Ireland for the rest of her life. The revenge exacted by Conchobor against Noísiu and his brothers, moreover, is depicted as the result of his desire to propound the legitimate authority of a unified, centralized Ireland under a single monarch, rather than as restitution for the outrage of his personal honour (cf. O'Leary 1994, 275–77, 315).

The potential for alteration, or complete omission, of an early text's obscure or sensitive content was also as common among Modern Irish adaptations as it was in the work of Anglo-Irish Revivalists writers. Ó Ceallaigh's Deirdriu, for example, is portrayed as a reserved and restrained woman throughout even the most turbulent scenes of the play, such as the final episode when she expires quietly beside Noísiu's grave rather than in it, without extended lamentation or committing any kind of violence against herself (1909, 28). Although Ó Ceallaigh was a clergyman, his delicate interpretations of potentially sensational elements of his material are characteristic of the general attitude of many writers during this period towards such aspects of the early literature, sentiments which may also reflect a desire to exalt characters whose

40 O'Leary analyses the sales figures for publications by the Gaelic League, noting the popularity of ‘little pamphlets containing single, simple folk-tales’, as opposed to academic anthologies even on a similar theme, as well as the disinterest in volumes of more unusual origin (such as the ‘solitary reader [who] bought the [Modern Irish] translation of a Greek hero tale from a German original’; 1994, 13).

41 Another had been performed in 1903, but the judges reported that although it was a work of high dramatic skill, the language was poorer than the other entries in the category for that year, and it does not appear to have been published; O'Leary 1994, 275 n.205.

behaviour was deemed more suitable to the tastes of contemporary Ireland.⁴² His description of the deaths of Deirdriu and Noísiu, for example, omits all reference to the episode, from several later-medieval versions, in which Deirdriu is said to have drunk Noísiu's blood from his wounds as he lies dying (e.g. Stokes 1887, ll.569–70, 589–90).⁴³ Although the complete omission of such material was common, some authors chose to temper their texts' retention of potentially controversial episodes by expressing covert concern about the conduct of the characters described. James Stephens's *Deirdre* (1923) contends that her death arose less from grief at the loss of the *maic Uislenn* than as the direct result of her post-mortem consumption of Noísiu's blood, an interpretation which might be thought to pre-empt contemporary revulsion at Deirdriu's behaviour by anticipating the ultimate consequence of such moral laxity as her action betrays.⁴⁴

Whether for the Gaelic League sympathizer or the monolingual Anglo-Irish poet, it is clear that concerns about appeasing wider contemporary delicacy, coupled with heated debates upon issues of Irish-language decline and revitalization, jostled for attention alongside thorny questions of translation and adaptation of disparate source material. The range of Deirdres described and performed during the Revival period cannot, therefore, be easily classified, whether Yeats's calmly manipulative, desolate queen, arguing the nature of jealousy with Conchobor over Noísiu's corpse (1982, 199),⁴⁵ Eva Gore-Booth's disturbed, visionary spiritualist, claiming that she had lived as Conchobor in a prior life and was suffering now through punishment for her own former mistakes (1930, 27–8; cf. Doyle 1999, 42), or William Graham's unconsciously naïve wanton, whose innocent nudity throughout the scene in which she proposes their elopement to Noísiu renders him docile and, ultimately, cooperative (1908, 38). Yet it would appear that, for any comprehensive analysis of Deirdre's portrayal by writers of the Revival, far greater significance than heretofore should be attached to the sources from which their material was drawn, whether these were convenient, English-language translations, such as O'Curry's thoughtfully-expanded edition of the earliest extant text of LMU, or any of the numerous letters exchanged between Yeats and his circle of acquaintance regarding, for example, the extent to which Deirdre's innate capacity for maternity should be emphasized within *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. Whilst the existence of more than twenty variations upon a tale which depict her in

42 O'Leary lists several other examples of modified episodes, mainly within adaptations of Ulster Cycle material; 1994, 239–40; cf. Stelmach 2007, 145, 159.

43 Stokes's text is from Adv. Lib. 72.2.6 [= NLS 56], late-eighteenth-century; cf. Black 1987 s.v. Adv. 72.2.6.

44 '[Deirdre] bowed over her husband's body: she sipped of his blood, and she died there upon his body'; Stephens 1923, 286. This line concludes the book, without further exploration of the cause of Deirdriu's death; there is no description of, for example, impassioned lamenting for the state of her life without the *maic Uislenn*, or a wild leap into their grave; cf. McFate 1969, 93. Stelmach also suggests that such attitudes are consistent with a nationalist ideology, which "sought to prove the Irish people's aptitude for maturity and self-government"; 2007, 159.

45 Deirdre: "You know too much of women to think so, / Though, if I were less worthy of desire, / I would pretend as much; but, being myself, / It is enough that you were master here./ Although we are so delicately made,/ There's something brutal in us, and we are won/ By those who can shed blood"; Yeats 1970, 90–1.

one form or another amply testifies to the popularity of Deirdre amongst writers of the period, the writing of her character during the Revival was far more complex than creating the Irish 'poster-child' posited by Stelmach (1999, *passim*) and Sarah del Collo (1999, 158–9), and no mere arbitrary process.

2.7: Stokes, Windisch and *Irische Texte*

The bulk of Stokes's text (1887) comprises an edition of OCU constructed from, respectively, the Glenmasan manuscript [Adv. 72.2.3 = NLS 53] and Adv. 72.2.6 [= NLS 56; cf. 3.3, below]. He also observes the texts of Keating, O'Flanagan and O'Curry as witnesses to the earlier strand, LMU, although no copy of this tale is provided. The existence of LMU in manuscript, within YBL, LL and Egerton 1782, also prefaces Stokes's presentation of the, for him, representative text of the later strand, OCU (1887, 114–15). Three years later, a text of LMU, from LL with variants from YBL and Egerton 1782, was published by Ernst Windisch (1880, 59–93). Like Stokes, Windisch also lists O'Curry, Keating, O'Flanagan and Macpherson as the four most important authors to have produced editions of the earlier text, though he concurs with O'Flanagan that the Ossianic *Dar-thula* is a work of monstrous fabrication (*id.*, 60).

2.8: Hull and *Longes mac n-Uislenn*

The publication of Vernam Hull's text of LMU (1949), comprising a filiation of the texts in LL, YBL and Egerton 1782, constituted the first modern critical edition of this narrative strand of material involving Deirdriu, as well as the first literal translation into English of the earliest-extant description of her relationship with Conchobor, Fergus and the *maic Uislenn*.⁴⁶ In his preface, Hull notes the disparity between LMU, and the later strands of OCU in which Deirdriu's relationship with the *maic Uislenn* has developed into the text's principal theme, and is also starkly different in style:

“[...] style and tone sharply differentiate [LMU and OCU]: whereas the earlier version is characterised by its economy of words and by its emotional restraint, the later version exhibits neither of these qualities [...] Its diffuseness is shown by its frequent employment of two or more synonymous words where one would suffice; its lack of emotional restraint is shown by the six lays that it assigns to Deirdriu in comparison to the two lays that the earlier version [LMU] allots to her to recite” (1949, 1).

Additionally, Hull concludes that “the redactor of [OCU] felt that Deirdriu did not play a colorful [sic] enough part in [LMU] merely as Noísiu's faithful companion and that, therefore, her role needed to be magnified. In consequence, by means of speeches, in which among other things she relates her premonitory dreams, he fashions her into the wise, prescient counsellor of the Sons of Uisliu [...]” (1949, 2). Similarly, the redactor “magnifies [the figures of] the Sons of Uisliu. Believing, no doubt, that in [LMU] their treacherous murder on the green of Emain Macha

⁴⁶ Windisch's edition of LMU from LL (1880) was not translated.

terminated their careers rather ingloriously in that they were not given an opportunity to acquit themselves in a worthy fashion, he has them perform great deeds of valour and inflict fearful havoc on their adversaries”. In short, Hull argues, the modifications to the narrative structure of LMU are “so numerous that they cannot be described in detail” in his preface alone (ibid.).⁴⁷

Hull's editorial principles and the basis of his edition are explored in greater detail at 3 2.1, below.

3. The manuscript tradition of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*

3.1: The Glenmasan Manuscript – Adv. 72. 2. 3 [NLS 53]

The Glenmasan manuscript [G] is the earliest and most important witness to the second narrative strand concerning Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn*. Given to the Highland Society, shortly before the completion of their report into the authenticity of the *Works of Ossian* (1805), the manuscript appears to date from the very end of the fifteenth century or the beginning of the sixteenth. Its second page contains the note: *Gleanmmasain an Cuige la deug don...Mi ::: do bhlian ar tsaorrse Mile da cheud trichid sa hocht*, ‘Glenmasan, the fifteenth day of the ...month [] of the year of our Redemption, one thousand two hundred thirty and eight’. Donald MacKinnon argued that “seeing that he is so particular as to the day of the month, the scribe is evidently copying an older entry to the same effect” (1912, 159). Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, however, concedes that whilst the note's author, William Campbell (1713–93), “must have had some authority when he is so specific, [and] while it is not impossible that this is the date of an older MS from which this MS was transcribed [,] we have no reason to believe so other than this note” (1993, 29). Ronald Black (1987 s.v. Adv. 72.2.3) reads the date as ‘1268’, speculating that it may have been an “error for 1768, as if [William Campbell] had omitted the D from MDCCLXVIII”.⁴⁸ Several signatures appear throughout the manuscript, four belonging to various members of the Campbell family of Cowal (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 28), one of whom, Robert, great-uncle of William, is probably the *Roibert Caimpbél Fear Foraiste mhic Chailean an Cómhal* whose poem to Edward Lhuyd was printed in preface to Lhuyd's *Archaeologia Britannica* in 1707 (Mackinnon 1904–5, 5). There are also several notes in both Gaelic and secretary hand (seventeenth-century) by John MacTavish, who “may have been responsible for bringing the manuscript from Ireland, where it was most probably written, to Scotland” (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 28). Following its transition, the manuscript appears to have circulated the region of Cowal for slightly over a century before being brought to scholars' attention (ibid.).

⁴⁷ The attempt to reconcile this vast disparity in content is returned to by Mac Giolla Léith in the introduction to his edition of OCU (1993, 14f.), with quite different conclusions; cf. 3.5, below.

⁴⁸ An opinion originally advanced by William Skene (McLauchlan and Skene 1862, lxxxviii, n.1).

A further note in the same hand as the bulk of the manuscript, *is bocht muintir an livairsi .i. Gilla R. 7 Dubthach*, has suggested to Black that G may have some connection to the celebrated scribes An Giolla Riabhach Ó Cléirigh and Dubhthach Ó Duibhgeannáinn, both of whom flourished in the early sixteenth century (Dubhthach Ó Duibhgeannáinn died in 1511). G may have been the product, he argues, of a school under their jurisdiction, before being brought, for reasons unknown, to Scotland (Black 1987, cited in Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 29).

The manuscript, made of vellum, has twenty seven leaves (52 pages), written in double columns (Stokes 1887, 109). There are 101 columns in total, numbered consecutively (Mackinnon 1904–5, 7). Black notes that the manuscript consists of:

“three gatherings (pp. i–14, 15–34, 37–52), and a single folio, pp.35–6, whose conjunct has been excised without textual loss. A chasm in the text indicates that the central bifolium of the first gathering is missing, and the two neighbouring bifolia have been bound in unlayered, thus disturbing the order of the surrounding text” (1987 s.v. Adv. 72.2.3).

This clarifies the description made by Mackinnon (1904–5), who implied that the misplaced leaf – the third, which ought to be the fifth – as well as the more substantial textual lacuna resulted from the absence of one bifolium, but stopped short of stating this to be the case. It is the absence of this bifolium which has led to the supposition that the copy of OCU contained in G is incomplete, and that, furthermore, the copy of *Táin Bó Flidais* which recommences after the gap is also lacking its opening paragraphs (e.g. Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 30). Incorrect folding of the second folio (as 4 1.1.1, below) is also responsible for the fact that the first four pages, containing the first sections of OCU, are interrupted by a “portion of the Cattlespoil of Flidais” before OCU “is resumed on the recto of the fourth leaf, and breaks off [due to the absent bifolium] on the verso of the same leaf” (Stokes 1887, 109).

The exact nature of the contents of G, the relationship between OCU and *Táin Bó Flidais* therein, and the importance of the manuscript as the earliest extant witness, post-LMU, to a tale concerning the relationship between Deirdriu, Conchobor and the *maic Uislenn*, will be examined in 4, below.

3.2: Subsequent manuscripts

Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith describes 89 further manuscripts which contain a complete copy of OCU (1993, 30–45).⁴⁹ A further 17 manuscripts, numbered 91–107, contain “incomplete or fragmentary copies” (id., 46–47), whilst “a poem or poems from OCU appear independently” in

49 Numbered, within his edition, 2–90 [1 = Glenmasan].

17 more, numbered 108–124 (id., 47–48).

With the exception of G, the most important copy of OCU occurs in RIA B iv 1, dated 4 September 1671 and signed by Dáibhí Ó Duibhgeannáinn of Seanchuaidh [Shancough], Co. Sligo (id., 30).⁵⁰ The text in RIA B iv 1 constitutes the earliest extant consecutive text of OCU. It is transcribed by Mac Giolla Léith (1993, 186–205, without line pagination). RIA B iv 1, unlike G, contains a description of the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* and Deirdre, the earliest description extant. The implications of its contents for the classification of OCU are considered below, at 4 1.3.9.

3.3: Whitley Stokes and *Irish Texts*

Stokes's text of the tale which he entitled 'The Death of the Sons of Uisneach' (1887, 109–184), was compiled from three sources. The opening portion is based upon G, until the end of column 16, when its text breaks off due to the loss of the central bifolium of the first gathering. The text of Adv. 72.2.6 [= NLS 56] supplies several episodes, concluding, as in LMU, with the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* and the exile of Fergus. The account of Deirdriu's death, appended to the exploits of Fergus following his departure from Ulster, is identical to Geoffrey Keating's account within *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn* (cf. 4 1.3.10, below). Stokes also inserts a poem, beginning *Soraidh soir go h-Albain uaim*, from TCD H.1.6 (i.e. O'Flanagan's probable source; as 2.3, above), which replaces Deirdriu's first lament for Noísiu in Adv. 72.2.6 (beginning *Mór na héachta so an Eamuín*). The composition of Stokes's final text is as follows (line numbers indicate his pagination [1887]):

- 1–494, from G, columns 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16.⁵¹ The text breaks off at bottom of column 16, at '*Is fír ón*'.
- 495–785, from Adv. 72.2.6. Text resumed from '*Uch mo thruadh*' ar Conall.
- 639–654 i.e. four stanzas, have been inserted into the poem beginning *Fada an la gan clann Uisneach*, from TCD H.1.6.

A complete edition of OCU from Adv. 72.2.6, with English translation, was prepared by Alexander Cameron (1892, 422–63).⁵²

3.4: Donald Mackinnon and Glenmasan in *The Celtic Review*

Donald Mackinnon's transcription of G was published in *The Celtic Review* between 1904 and 1908 (1904–5, 1905–6, 1906–7, 1907–8). He describes the manuscript, its potential date (as 3.1,

50 RIA B iv 1 is described by O'Rahilly et. al. (n. d.) in the *Catalogue of the Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, fasciculi I–IV; 586–93.

51 Stokes refers to the columns as [p.1, col.1] for column 1, etc., to [p.7, col.1] for column 13 et. seq. Cf. 4 1.1.1, below.

52 Cameron also transcribed the contents of G, but did not translate them (id., 464–74).

above), and speculates upon the path of its migration between several signatories to the text (1904–5, 5–6). Mackinnon also provides a synopsis of the entire contents of G from the first line of OCU (1904–5, 12; *Do comoradh fled mor-cháin mor-adhbhal la Conchobar mac Fachtna Fhataigh [...]*) to the closing sentence of *Táin Bó Flidais* (1907–8, 218, *Gurb hí Táin Bó Flidais go ruici sin. Finit. Amen*), transcribing the tale sequentially⁵³ and providing a literal translation with extensive notes.

Mackinnon posited a closer connection between LMU and the tale recounted in G than has been subsequently popular:

“Perhaps one would not be very far astray in suggesting that [G] was put together at a very early date by an Irish scholar; that a copy found its way to Argyllshire, and underwent considerable revision there, the obscure rhetoric passages regarding the birth, beauty and future of Deirdre found in the LL version being excised, and the sojourn of the exiles in Scotland expanded; and that the MS. as we now have it was transcribed from this recension, or from a copy of it which was dated 1238 AD and connected somehow with Glenmasan, by an Argyllshire scribe [...]” (1904–5, 6).

His summary of the potential origins of G is echoed by Hull's supposition that inclusion of the opening sections of LMU relating to Deirdriu's birth and upbringing had been deemed unnecessary, due to the fact that they were “too familiar to require recapitulation” (1949, 1). Mackinnon notes, however, that Stokes, preparing the text of his 1887 edition, presented his audience with these accounts as well, which, of necessity, were supplied from another source (Stokes “transcribed from MS. [Adv. 72.2.6 = NLS 56] the opening sections of the Tale” [Mackinnon 1904–5, 7]).

3.5: Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith and *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*

The publication in 1993 of Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith's text of OCU marked the culmination of several years' research into the development of Deirdriu's character between the earlier and later versions of the tales by which she is described (1989, 1994). The intention of his text, to “provide a critical edition of the Early Modern Irish prose tale *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*” (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 1) resulted in a meticulous description of its manuscript sources, of which at least 125 remain extant, containing either partial or complete copies of the prose tale, or else independently transmitted poems once intercalated within fuller prose versions (id., 27–48; cf. 3.2, above). As in Stokes's edition (1887), the text of G is adhered to until the lacuna occurs (at l.618 in Mac Giolla Léith 1993), after which a hypothesised “correct” conclusion of OCU has been reconstructed, according to criteria examined in detail at 4 1.2, below. The majority of ll.619–867, i.e. from the end of G's text to the end of the reconstructed conclusion, is taken from

⁵³ The disordered nature of the leaves of the manuscript (see above 3.1 and 3 3.4.1, below) has resulted in the need to print several columns outwith their strict order within the bound manuscript, e.g. the end of column 8 continues at the top of column 13 (Mackinnon 1904–5, 116, 118, 120).

MS. Maynooth M103 (Mac Giolla Léith's manuscript 18, written c.1762–4; 1993, 34), with an insert – ll.762–63 – describing the death of Maine Lámhgharbh, from BL Egerton 164 (c.1726–7; id., 31–32, i.e. manuscript 6).

The edition also contains a transcription of G (id., 63–80), a transcription of OCU from RIA B iv 1, and a copy of Keating's description of Deirdriu's birth and death, deemed the “Introduction” and “Epilogue” to OCU respectively, from NLI G113 (id., 206–13).

4. Critical commentary on *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* and Deirdriu

4.1: Introduction

Excepting analyses of Deirdriu's personal characteristics, her tragic propensity for fore-ordained disaster, or the triangular nature of her relationship with Conchobor and Noísiu (see below), there has been relatively little critical examination of the tale structures of LMU and OCU, or of the relationship between the two versions. A significant number of scholars have focused indiscriminately upon what might be termed the thematic content of both LMU and OCU, inasmuch as both texts' narratives have been used to support preconceived notions of Deirdriu/Deirdre as their main protagonist. Dorothy Hoare, for example (1937, 128), paraphrasing Thurneysen's description in *Heldensage* of Deirdriu's birth, life-span and death, expressed surprise that “even in Irish there are two versions of the tale”. B.K. Martin notes only that “two chief versions” of a 'Deirdre-tale' exist, one a *longes*, the other an *aided* (1975–6, 138–9). It is possible that inattentiveness to the actually disparate nature of OCU in comparison to LMU, and to the divergent character of Deirdriu/Deirdre herself within both texts, is a consequence of the use to which her character was put within the corpus of Revivalist literature, and the general neglect of its authors, poets and playwrights to distinguish between the origins of the source material they adapted (cf. 2.6, above). Critical differentiation between LMU and OCU as separate narrative strands has been limited to comments such as Vernam Hull's (cf. 2.8, above), that “style and tone sharply differentiate them: whereas [LMU] is characterized by its economy of words and by its emotional restraint, [OCU] exhibits neither of these qualities...” (1949, 1). This distinction pays little heed to the disparate content of the two strands, and fails to address marked differences between the construction and presentation of the texts' respective episodes and central characters (e.g. Gerard Murphy's stylistic-only contrast of the “unrealistic beauty” of OCU to LMU's “warrior realism” [1955, 31]). To date, only Maria Tymoczko has addressed the difficulties facing the textual critic of LMU and its later medieval developments:

“It is obvious, though seldom remarked, that the narrative form of [LMU] has changed considerably in the 1200 years through which we can trace it: it has assumed a number of narrative genres including religious myth, heroic saga, romance, legendary anecdote, and folk

narrative, while some of the more recent manuscript versions include the sort of psychological probings that are characteristic of the early stages of novel” (1994, 73).

She also suggests that the exchanges of *rosc* between Deirdriu's father and Cathbad at the beginning of LMU (e.g. ll.14–29) may constitute “an analogue to theatre”, where “the addition of a second speaker moves lyric [verse/ prose] towards drama” (1994, 77–78). The poems spoken by Deirdriu following Noísiu's death, she notes, may be read as examples of lyrics found within a prose context which “are either earlier or later than the narratives in which they are found”, and where

“linguistic features of the poems indicate that they are later than the prose of the narrative and where, moreover, a reference to Noise [sic] as having golden hair rather than black hair indicates that one of the poems does not presuppose the three-colour motif which is central to the prose text. The poems have, in short, been recontextualized after being entextualized from a primary context” (1994, 81–82).⁵⁴

The text of LMU, Tymoczko concludes, constitutes a “blended genre”, incorporating disparate episodes in both verse and prose (1994, 82).

4.2: Critical notice of the later tradition

In contrast to the wide-ranging critical opinions concerning Deirdriu, Noísiu, and the general themes of LMU, only four scholars have commented upon the construction of the later versions of OCU, or upon the characterisation of their protagonists. Caoimhín Breatnach (1994) considers the possible sources of G, and whether or not it may have been one of the sources utilised by Keating within *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn*. Ruairí Ó hUiginn (2006) has suggested that the contents of G may represent a single continuous narrative, as opposed to two individual tales, OCU and *Táin Bó Flidais* (cf. 3 3.4.1, below). Philip O'Leary and David Gabriel both discuss the concept of honour as a component of OCU, in relation to Deirdre's understanding of social conventions. Gabriel (1995, 74–79) refers to Deirdre's repeated attempts to prevent the *maic Uislenn* from returning to Ulster under Fergus' protection, claiming that she has “failed to grasp the significance of the taboos placed on Fergus”, and mocking the men's code of honour “by suggesting that compliance can be avoided through trickery”. O'Leary, alternatively, suggests that, far from being ignorant of the social code, Deirdriu's death results from her compliance to its restrictions. He notes that her death within LMU does not occur “until she is out of the privacy of the house and on her way to the great Assembly of Macha, where her degradation [i.e. that she is to be passed to Eogan mac Durthacht] will be presented as a public spectacle” (1987, 41–42), and that in versions of OCU which omit mention of the assembly, “the depth of her hatred [for Eogan and Conchobor] is heavily emphasized [and she kills herself] after Conchobor's vicious

54 Cf. Tymoczko 1985–6, 149, in which the notion that Noísiu may once have been said to have yellow hair is discussed; cf. 3 2.2.6, below.

joke, a public utterance even if heard by just the three of them” (1987, 42). Gabriel also comments that, in contrast to the prophecy to which Deirdriu is subject within LMU, in the later tale it is her own words that are portentous, and constitute an element of her power over Noísiu. This fails, he suggests, when her prophetic visions are “scorned and ignored by her travelling companions”, who return to Ulster with Fergus in spite of all her urgings to the contrary (1995, 73). Patrick Sims-Williams also notes the occurrence of traditions relating to Deirdre within late-medieval Wales, when the prophetic aspect of her character within OCU is satirised, and she is mocked as “a figure of fun”. Several poems refer to the reluctance of 'Derdri' to cross water, which Sims-Williams interprets as a reference to the fact that the *maic Uislenn* ultimately ignored her words of warning and returned to Ulster from Scotland, crossing the Irish Sea (1983, 12). Sufficient decontextualization, however, has occurred within the Welsh tradition to ensure that 'Derdri' is also interpreted as a masculine noun, ‘phantom’, or as the proper name of a male character, e.g. *derdri henw gwr*, ‘a man’s name’ (Sims-Williams 1983, 10; cf. Jones 1984, 154).

The paucity of criticism of OCU as a tale in its own right may have arisen, argues Caoimhín Breatnach, from a more general scholarly neglect of the Early Modern Irish prose tradition (also noted by Myles Dillon [1948, 16], who claimed that consideration of OCU had suffered from the “rather fastidious censure” of critics who could not appreciate “baroque” literature in place of the “Cistercian bareness” of earlier tales such as LMU). Much past scholarship, Breatnach suggests, “reflects a marked contrast between a plethora of (largely unsubstantiated) general observations on this [Early Modern] material and a lack of rigorous analysis of the primary sources, i.e. the texts themselves” (1996a, 189). He also disagrees with Proinsias Mac Cana’s earlier assertion that the popularity and survival of the 'Deirdre-tale' was assured from the Early to the Early Modern period because it was unreservedly full of the “love and wonder and romance” which, as Breatnach notes, are almost entirely absent from, for instance, the text of OCU in G, due to the text’s commencement only after Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn* have left Ulster (id., 194).

4.3: The critics and Deirdriu

In light of infrequent differentiation between LMU, OCU and the diverse natures of the protagonists in both, the following overview of existing critical opinion reflects the main thematic concerns of the commentators.

4.3.1: Kingship and sovereignty

The relationship between Deirdriu, Noísiu and Conchobor has often been analysed in accordance with the motif of the sacral connection which may exist between the ruler of a kingdom, the female representative of that kingship, and a challenger to his rule. The extent to which Deirdriu may represent the *flaithius*, or sovereignty goddess, with Conchobor as the wrongful ruler either

clinging to his power beyond its reasonable span, or being deprived of leadership in response to a specific instance of misconduct, has been assessed by a variety of commentators.⁵⁵ Characteristic of these critics' conclusions is Proinsias Mac Cana's statement that the plot of the generic 'Deirdre-tale' concerns "the perennial triangle of the woman, the old man who possesses her, and the young man who takes her" (1982, 146). Mac Cana also refers to Deirdriu as "an adaptation in human terms of the archetypal goddess figure", who, alongside Medb, exemplifies the "goddess [,] who by her own right selects her partner for his kingly qualities and thereby validates him in office" (1980b, 9–10). Raymond Cormier, misreading the progression of the elopement scene, finds a residue of Deirdriu's former *flaithius* status in the kisses she bestows upon Noísiu during their first meeting, comparing these kisses to those bestowed by Gráinne upon Diarmaid at a crucial moment during his conflict with Fionn mac Cumhaill (1976, 599). Maria Tymoczko also suggests that Deirdriu's character in LMU

"has several vestigial Sovereignty elements [...] Her beauty is, of course, the most obvious element linking her to Sovereignty figures – it is a beauty that will make high queens 'jealous' of her 'faultless form' [...] There are some hints that Deirdriu's beauty fades when Noísiu is dead and she is kept prisoner by Conchobor [i.e. her sleeplessness and failure to 'redden her fingernails']. With the loss of her beauty we might compare the wretched state of other literary reflexes of the Sovereignty as a counterpart to the appearance of the Sovereignty as an ugly hag; since she is presented here as a mortal woman, however, Deirdriu loses only her bloom" (1985–6, 156–57).

Tymoczko counters, however, that "we would not expect the goddess to leave her home territory as Deirdriu does when she goes to Scotland, nor would we expect the goddess to end as a suicide" (id., 158). Próinséas Ní Chatháin's suggestion that Deirdriu's name may once have signified 'acorn' (1979–80, 210–11), also leads Tymoczko to note that such an interpretation would provoke a close parallel with 'Eithne' ('kernel'), "the name borne by a number of supernatural women including women in myths associated with Lughnasad" (1985–6, 165 n.37).

Noísiu's fitness to attract the attentions of the *flaithius* has been discussed by Jean Gricourt, who reads in LMU vestiges of the ritual practice of sacrificing the ageing sacral king in favour of a younger replacement. Deirdriu, he suggests, retains an elemental resemblance to a horse-goddess, akin to Epona or Rhiannon (1954, 37). Proinsias Mac Cana also assessed the *maic Uislenn* as "the literary reflex of a triune deity" (1981, 147), following Anne Ross, who reads Deirdriu as a reflection of the goddess who mates with three brothers, otherwise a god in three-fold form (1967, 273). Tymoczko adds that "Noísiu and his brothers are described in a way that indicates they might make ideal kings" (1985–6, 155). Cornelius Buttmer also considers at length how Noísiu, corresponding to Deirdriu's "impression of the ideal male", is described in terms which signify his membership of the *fíán*, in social contrast to Conchobor's established kingship (1994–

55 Who tend, moreover, to substantiate this claim by noting Noísiu's success in wresting Deirdriu from his control.

5, 9, 10–15; cf. McCone 1986).

A figure of sovereignty, initially anonymous, may be given a name within the course of the tale in which she appears, signifying her function within that context. Ann Dooley reads Deirdriu's name, and the manner in which it is bestowed upon her by Cathbad, as an indication of her function within the tale: “the child who screams from the prison of the womb and disturbs the feast becomes the woman who disturbs society by creating her own autonomous language of free desire” (1982, 156). Buttimer remarks that the “naming of individuals in the Ulster Cycle and other strands of the literature is of more than merely semantic interest, with stories turning on nuances inherent in the nomenclature of their major characters, whether male or female”. He compares *derdrethar*, the verb from which Deirdriu's name appears to be derived, with the “cunning and ferociousness” exemplified by the scheming Bláthnait, the 'weasel', within *Aided Con Roí* (1994–5, 7 and n.21; cf. 3 2.3, below).

4.3.2: Deirdriu as *femme fatale*

Ultimately, critics have acknowledged Deirdriu's threat to Ulster, whether unwitting *enfant sauvage* or calculating *femme fatale* (as for E.G. Quin 1959, 55, and B.K. Martin 1975–6, 143). Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin describes her as an “erotically” powerful woman (1985, 113). For David Gabriel, Deirdriu's combination of beauty and treachery epitomizes the negative power of women (1995, *passim*). Raymond Cormier reads her role within LMU as that of “an instrument of destiny, the predetermined cause of exile and carnage, a force of destruction” (1976-8, 309). For Mac Cana, Deirdriu's femininity is “impetuous, passionate, destined for tragedy from her birth”, the “personification of the romantic, mystical, reckless love that flouts convention and social order and imperils the wellbeing of the community” (1982, 147). Mac Cana's view echoes Gertrude Schoepperle's, for whom the central conflict of LMU is one of passion versus the social order (1960, 466). Cormier, echoing James Carney (1979, 234–5) and W. Ann Trindade, also refers to Deirdriu as the 'Irish Iseult', reading her character as the inspiration for subsequent Continental heroines whose tragic fates are similarly predestined (Cormier 1976-8; Trindade 1986, 1987). Carney considered LMU to be “the earliest example of a borrowing from the British *Tristan*” tradition (1979, 190f.).

The most commonly advanced symbol of Deirdriu's, and Ulster's, predestined fate is the prophecy uttered by Cathbad within the opening episode of LMU. Similarly, the symbol of Noísiu's preordained death is the *geis*, or taboo, which he violates by acceding to Deirdriu's entreaty and removing her from the custody of Conchobor, his overlord. Critics have expressed both sympathy and condemnation for Deirdriu's situation. Raymond Cormier refers to the “pathetic situation” of a heroine enveloped in a “tragic drama, illustrating the overwhelming

nature of *gessa*, before which humans are helpless” (1976, 600). Mac Cana contends that Deirdriu was “destined for tragedy from her birth” (1982, 147). Critical sympathy is even greater for Noísiu's position, caught between the dangers of offending his overlord and the implied consequences of violating the *geis* invoked by Deirdriu, both of which entail dishonour and, potentially, physical violence to his person. Ann Dooley suggests that the audience of Ulstermen privy to Cathbad's prophecy may have included the *maic Uislenn* or, at least, that Noísiu's reluctance to accede to Deirdriu's request indicates his prior knowledge of the girl's malign destiny. She argues, however, that the implications of violating a *geis* remain uppermost: “Naoise (sic) is persuaded to defy [Cathbad's] prophecy because, on the advice of his brothers, he ought properly to fear the public ritual words of ridicule spoken by the woman, words which would deny his male warrior autonomy and efficacy” (1982, 155).

The scream uttered by the unborn Deirdriu has also been assessed as the impetus for Cathbad's prophecy. Cornelius Buttimer notes that this pre-natal shriek is the earliest indication of the importance of sound to the narrative of LMU, prefiguring the *gáir* uttered by the assembled Ulstermen shortly before Deirdriu's own (1994–5, 2ff.) The contrast, he suggests, is drawn between the child's noise and the request for silence issued by Sencha mac Ailella, in order that her mother may speak. Buttimer notes the “role assigned to aural imagery at the commencement of Irish texts, particularly those with a less than auspicious outcome” (id., 6). He assigns further significance to Deirdriu's scream because it was uttered during her infancy (actually, before birth), in comparison to other Medieval Irish material which dwells upon the often macabre destiny of youthful speakers, such as Cú Chulainn's son in *Aided Óenfir Afte* (id., 7). Joan Radner (1990, 177f.) also compares Deirdriu's cry to the speeches of the infant Aí mac Ollamh ('Poetic Inspiration son of Great Scholar'), in an allegorical tale found in LL and YBL, in which the boy prophesies that the art of poetry will become equal to that of kingship. The threat is considered so grave that the king who overhears it desires the child's death in the hope, similar to Conchobor's, of frustrating the fulfilment of his words (ibid.). Buttimer also notes that Conchobor's refusal to heed Cathbad's advice, and kill Deirdriu, is inconsistent with his previous adherence to the druid's counsel, and is interpreted unfavourably by the assembled Ulstermen: “given the reciprocal character of the druid's and [Conchobor's] relationship, [Conchobor's] resolve vis-à-vis Deirdriu would seem to represent a departure from a mode of conduct hitherto founded on cautious circumspection” (1994–5, 8–9). Máire Herbert suggests that Conchobor's assumption of responsibility for Deirdriu constitutes a “prideful transgression of the limits of power [and] the primary breach of [his] duty”. She asserts that Conchobor recognises the threat which Deirdriu's existence poses to the “ordered world of society” into which her cry so crudely erupts, and that he “wished to neutralize the external element rather than accept it on its own terms. [Deirdriu] was taken over by the king to be brought utterly under social domination”

(1992, 56–57). By this action, Herbert suggests, Conchobor seeks to subvert the usual “equilibrium” of the relationship of “female/ male, nature/ culture”, exemplified by the king-god who mates with the sovereignty figure. His appropriation of Deirdriu’s upbringing testifies to a desire to “achieve a position of dominance of the male principle over the female”, which fails when the girl is ultimately depersonalised by her seclusion and becomes a “child of nature, who grew to womanhood unschooled in societal norms” (id., 57).

4.3.3: The elopement scene

The isolation of Deirdriu’s secluded upbringing has been interpreted as the primary cause of her behaviour during the scene in which she and Noísiu first meet. Ann Dooley concludes that this seclusion has resulted in the creation of a “true enfant sauvage”. Her subsequent grasp upon a language “learnt apart from society”, therefore, is perfectly attuned to the language of the *maic Uislenn*, whose “particular and mysterious *andord*” – the ‘tenor singing’ which causes cows to give two thirds surplus of milk – is also a “human discourse below the level of word” (1982, 156). Máire Herbert and Maria Tymoczko also discuss the so-called ‘savage’ terminology of the elopement scene, in which Deirdriu grasps Noísiu by his two ears and compares his *tarbín óag* to the *tarb in chóicid*: Noísiu’s ‘young bull’ to Conchobor’s ‘bull of the province’. Dooley argues that the uncivilized Deirdriu understands herself only in terms of property, as an item of a specific value which may be exchanged, referring to herself as a symbol capable of being passed between the two men. Her interest in bulls, Dooley continues, indicates that she chooses, perhaps unconsciously, “nature” (i.e. mating) over the civilized culture of possession and obligated exchange. Noísiu, however, “reads herds as property”, and is horrified that Deirdriu expresses the wish to exchange the valuable object of the king, the ‘bull of the province’, for one of lesser worth (1982, 156–67). Herbert suggests that Noísiu is unprepared for exposure to language of this kind, which falls “completely outside of learned cultural convention” (1992, 57–58). Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, moreover, comments that the conversation between Deirdriu and Noísiu exudes “overtly sexual overtones” (1994, 120).

Maria Tymoczko, however, argues that “it is apparent that the cattle metaphors [employed during this scene] were richer for the original audience than they are for us, [e.g.] Noísiu doesn’t just call Deirdriu a ‘heifer’ but a *samaisc*, a ‘two-year-old heifer’, one well able to be bred”. The girl has been reared as a heifer, she continues, “solely to be bulled [...] penned – raised in a *les* – until she is ready for breeding purposes” (1985–6, 150). This nurture is compelling, Tymoczko notes, for Deirdriu refers to Noísiu, her potential mate, as well as herself in terms of property, “seizing her beloved [by his two ears] as she would seize a favourite calf” (id., 152; cf. Buttimer 1994–5, 15 and n.53: “her action is perhaps to be read as a means of capturing or taming an animal”). Patricia Kelly (1992, 76), with reference to the *táin bó* classification of tales, also equates “cattle

with humans [,] and particularly women with cows”. Thomas Clancy discusses the occurrence of similar, albeit subverted, farmyard language within *Comracc Liadaine agus Cuirithir*, where its use denotes a contrasting lack of sexual availability: Cuirithir may have “no cow, nor the bulling of a heifer” (1996, 68–69). Vernam Hull, however, the only commentator who omits reference to the use of human and/ or bovine terminology within the elopement scene, interprets her grasping of Noísiu's ears as a symbol of Deirdriu's implication that “he has as much manhood as his ears contain gristle unless he comes to her aid” (1949, 101; cf. Hull 1939, 328–31).

Deirdriu's grasping of Noísiu's two ears, at the same time as she requests him to remove her from Ulster, has been interpreted as a *geis*, the symbol of Fate's role within LMU. Maria Tymoczko argues that Deirdriu's action constitutes a plot-device, possibly a *geis*, due to the part of his body which she chooses to grasp – a person's ears, she suggests, displaying a “prime sign of human shame since they redden along with the cheeks” (1985–6, 152). For David Gabriel, however, Noísiu's destiny is decided less “by an invisible Fate [than] by the young woman, Deirdriu, who so capriciously grabbed his ears” (1995, 61). Gabriel also considers the role, elsewhere, of a compelling action and/ or physical object, suspecting the implicit impact of a supernatural *ball seirce* (‘love spot’), in a tale of this kind, without which Noísiu “would never have been able to seduce Conchobor's fiancée” (1995, 84). For Gabriel, Deirdriu's invocation of this device upon Noísiu constitutes the most significant expression of her power within LMU, by which she seeks to create “new boundaries outside society in which both partners may act unrestrained” (id., 83). He disagrees, therefore, with Máire Herbert, who argues that Deirdriu, as a result of her secluded upbringing, genuinely believes that social constraints may be evaded (1992, 58). By forswearing their loyalty to Conchobor, she continues, the *maic Uislenn* make the transition into her world, not she into theirs.

4.3.4: Snow white, blood red

The elopement scene follows the most famous episode within LMU. A calf is skinned by Deirdriu's foster-father, its red blood pooling onto the white snow as a black raven alights to drink from it. Use of this international motif, H.312.5 (cf. Cross 1952), within LMU has been interpreted, variously, as a suitor test; as a reference to Deirdriu's repressed desire, or as an indication of the intrinsic fatalism of LMU (Tymoczko 1985–6, 147 ff.; cf. Buttimer 1994–5, 13–14, n.47). Tymoczko writes that “[Deirdriu] is attracted towards the chaos and destruction she is fated to cause”, and suggests that the colours of the skinned calf and its effect upon her childhood foreshadow Noísiu's future role as her companion, and similarly-doomed creature. She argues:

“Just as the calf is slaughtered unawares and undefended in the foster father's enclosure, so

Noísiu is the beloved who comes to be slaughtered treacherously, unawares in Conchobor's *les*. But the image prefigures Deirdriu's death as well, for at the end of the story she, too, becomes a slaughtered beloved, a dead favourite. In this respect it is significant that the slaughtered calf is a 'weaned calf'; it is apparently a young animal, suggesting Deirdriu herself who goes to meet her fate just as she leaves childhood" (1985–6, 148).

Ann Dooley also speculates whether or not Deirdriu and Leborcham may be said to have "called up" Noísiu, during their dialogue following Deirdriu's observation of the calf's death, first by "a colour-coded wish for a lover from Deirdriu", exclaiming *ro-pad inmain oenfer forsa-mbetis na tri dath ucut*, 'beloved would be the one man on whom might be yonder three colours' (LMU 1.94), followed by "his identification by Leborcham" as one of the Ulster warriors (Dooley 1994, 129).

Following this overview of critical interpretations of LMU, OCU, their respective manuscript sources, and Deirdriu's characterisation, Chapter 2 will assess the variety of methodological approaches taken, thus far, with regard to each aspect – within the wider context of Celtic literary studies – before proceeding to define the approach that will be adopted during all subsequent discussion and analysis.

Chapter Two

Outline of methodological approach

Synopsis

This chapter will outline: a brief survey of narratological theory; previous applications of narratology within the field of Celtic Studies; techniques of analysing characters and characterisation within medieval literature; and a statement of theoretical intent for subsequent textual analysis.

1: Techniques of analysis: narratologies and the Early Irish tale

1.1: Introduction

The application of modern critical linguistic and narratological theory to medieval texts, often anonymous and of uncertain origin, remains infrequent within the field of Celtic Studies. The work of certain scholars, therefore, is notable for its consistent awareness of the value of comprehensive textual analysis in lieu of other, less critical, forms of textual evaluation (e.g. Ó Cathasaigh 1985, 123; 1981, 1989).

Despite its infrequent use, several elements of narratological theory denote its suitability for the analysis of Early and Early Modern Irish tales. Narratologists reject, for example, a text's biographical author as a factor of fundamental importance for its critical assessment. This approach is eminently suitable for analysing the anonymous form in which the majority of Early and Early Modern Irish tales have been preserved.⁵⁶ Instead of this kind of authorial presence, the narratological critic seeks to distinguish the presence of the text's narrator. This narrator, distinct from a biographical author, may be defined as "a linguistic subject, a function and not a person [...], that agent which utters the linguistic signs which constitute the text" (Bal 1985, 119–20). This approach has the benefit of reducing the likelihood that circumstantial anonymity will continue to impede the analysis of a textual unit, e.g. an unattributed poem, play, or prose tale.

Throughout the following discussion and analysis, the term 'author' will refer to informed speculation regarding the provenance of a text or the potential identity of its scribe, or the

⁵⁶ This is not the same principle as rejecting the relevance of a particular text's provenance, or place of origin, should these factors be known. The inclusion of a particular text within a particular manuscript, or the association of a certain tale with a certain sequence of events external to it, may require an adjustment of its overall interpretation on the part of the critic. Whilst this type of contextualization is more commonly associated with poetic texts, it has been argued that there is no reason to suppose that prose tales could not also be composed or reshaped with a particular audience in mind (e.g. Breatnach 1996b, 5). Thomas Clancy (2005, 163ff.) discusses the use of the prose text *Oidheadh Conlaoich*, describing the death of Cú Chulainn's only son, as an apologue to an elegy composed by Giolla Coluim mac an Ollaimh, mourning the murder of Aonghus Óg mac Eoin in 1490 (Aonghus's father was suspected of having played some part in his son's death, just as Cú Chulainn was ultimately responsible for Conlaoch's demise within the tale). A distinction between the circumstances of a tale's composition, and the internal construction of the text of that tale, is made with the intention of clarifying both factors, where present, not in order to privilege or dismiss either one.

compiler of the manuscript where the text is found, and should be understood as distinct from the narratorial voice utilised and manipulated by this author within the text he/ she has created.

Exploration of a character's individualism, or its psychological exposition, neither of which are commonly found within the Early Irish prose tale, are also of lesser importance to the narratological critic than the assessment of that character's placement within the textual structure, alongside its contribution to the progression of the narrative, and/ or its interaction amongst, or precedence over, other characters within the text. This is not to say that any subsequent enrichment of a text's technical composition is dismissed, only that it is of subsidiary importance to an initial consideration of the characters' interaction with each other, within the text, as "abstract units", distinct from additional responses imposed, for example, by an audience's emotive perception of their behaviour. Mieke Bal (1985, 50) has stressed the importance of this separation for distinguishing "those [abstract] relations and the relations between the reader and the characters, [from] the flows of sympathy and antipathy between the characters [,] and from the reader to the individual characters". In other words, the distinction aims to avoid criticism of a text that is primarily emotive, predicated upon the assumptions of critic or audience as to what a given text ought to contain, or how a character ought to be perceived, regardless of that text's actual structure or the character's actual status within its confines. A primary concern of this thesis is to avoid any repetition of the emotive responses to Deirdriu's tribulations expressed by the authors and commentators of the Irish Revival (cf. 1 2.6, above).

1.2: Martin, Todorov and Tristram

Brian Martin's article, 'Medieval Irish *aitheda* and Todorov's *Narratologie*' (1975–6), constitutes the only critical analysis of LMU to date to employ narratological terminology, chiefly with regard to the theories of Russian formalist critic Tzvetan Todorov. Martin criticised what he saw as a prevailing tendency amongst critics to "treat the stories of Deirdre, Gráinne and Bláthnait in terms of what they might have been, or of what they became [i.e. Arthurian prototypes or antecedents] rather than in terms of what they actually are in our texts" (id., 140). He disagrees with theorists such as Krappe (1936), whose analysis of LMU alongside *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* and *Aided Conrói maic Dáiri* – under the heading of *aitheda*, elopement tales – attempted to objectify Noísiu and Curói alongside Diarmaid, under the preconceived conviction that both men exemplified "Adonis-figures killed by a boar" (Martin 1975–6, 141). Both Noísiu and Curói, in fact, meet their deaths at the hands of human enemies, Conchobor and Cú Chulainn, neither of whom may plausibly be read as euhemerized boar-gods, as Krappe suggested. Martin also objects to earlier critics' attempts to "fit the principle [sic] figures of [the *aitheda*] into some established mythological paradigm or set", such as the seasonal model favoured by Arthurian scholar R. S. Loomis (1927, 45–51; 1949, 132–3, 214–18), and the

Rees brothers (1961, 279–96). For these critics, components of such a 'set', or paradigm, must include “a date [...], a ritual conflict between Summer and Winter, a female representative of a new season, and a period for unconventional sexual acts such as elopements and abductions” (Martin 1975–6, 141). In the case of LMU, Martin notes, only one objection to the validation of such hypotheses is that at the time of the tale's commencement, when the purported 'female representative of a new season' (i.e. Deirdriu) is first made aware of the object of her subsequent intent – the desire for an elopement or unconventional act – it is midwinter (ibid.).

Todorov's theory of narration, as summarised by Martin (id., 142) comprises two distinct formulae, often combined in practice:

- The narrative propositions, i.e. the *noms propres* (i.e. characters/ actants whose actions embody the progress of a given narrative); the *adjectifs* (the attributes of each actant); and the narrative *verbes*, whether a) *modifier la situation*, a character's action or external event that affects the status quo; b) *accomplir un méfait*, the (deliberate) performance of a crime or misdemeanour by a given actant; and c) *punir*, the consequences of b), or the attempt by an actant to escape them. Each of these *verbes* may also be qualified by a number of secondary categories, such as opposition or comparison (ibid.).
- The sequences of propositions, i.e. successive actions of *noms propres* throughout the text. Of two kinds, *séquences attributives* “narrate how the subjects of propositions are happy or unhappy, in love or not in love”, etcetera, whilst *séquences de loi* “narrate how the subjects of propositions commit some misdeed and are either punished for it or perhaps contrive to escape punishment [e.g. *punir*]” (ibid.).

Sequences may be simple or compound, and, if compound, may occur in combination or as concurrent, embedded episodes within the text (ibid.).

Martin applies the tenets of Todorov's general theory to LMU, beginning with the division of its plot into several sequences, or *propositions*, each one describing either an actant – an active character – or an action undertaken by that actant (id., 142–4).⁵⁷ Some sequences may run concurrently: Martin's Sequence I (a), for example, breaks off after Deirdriu's and Noísiu's departure for Scotland, and resumes when they are deceived into returning, whilst Sequence II (b) – classified as “embedded” – describes events in Scotland which occur at the same time as Conchobor's anger at their departure plays out in Ulster. In addition to the active *propositions*, Todorov's theory also distinguishes *séquences attributives*, describing a character's mood – whether happy, sad, in love, etcetera – and *séquences de loi*, describing a situation in which a

⁵⁷ These propositions follow Todorov's *Grammaire du Décameron* (1969).

character either commits an offence or misdemeanour, or seeks to escape from the consequences of having committed one already. Each actant, action, mood and situation is represented by a letter, or connective symbol, ultimately producing a formula describing the extent of a particular narrative text, and the participation of its respective characters/ actants. The conclusion of LMU, for example, is categorized by Martin as: $\rightarrow YcXZ // X -A // Yb$, where X represents Deirdriu, Y Conchobor, and Z Noísiu. Each formula represents a particular situation such as, in this instance, the final scene of LMU, following the death of the brothers as a result of Conchobor's machinations, and Deirdriu's subsequent despair. \rightarrow indicates that this situation is the result of the one before (i.e. Conchobor's intention to recover Deirdriu once Noísiu has been removed). Yc indicates that a new *sequence de loi*, distinct from the previous situation(s), is in play from Conchobor,⁵⁸ at the expense of X and Z, Deirdriu and Noísiu, who are both directly affected by his actions. A refers to Deirdriu's subsequent state of mind, which is negative, hence – , whilst Yb indicates that Conchobor's actions within Sequence c conclude the action set in motion during Sequence b, the earlier *proposition*. // indicates that each situation occurs concurrently with the other two, in response to the same action (i.e. Conchobor's desire to cause Noísiu's death and regain his previous custody of Deirdriu).

Having applied Todorov's theory to LMU, Martin concludes that the tale is chiefly an *histoire de loi*, a narrative of misdemeanour, in which “the three principals [X, Y and Z] severely infringe the laws of honour which were accepted as governing the behaviour of kings and nobles” (1975–6, 144). Todorov's theory itself, however, whilst not uncomfortably strained by application to a text other than the one for which it was created (i.e. the *Decameron*), is nonetheless reductive. Ainnle and Ardán, Noísiu's brothers, are categorized by Martin as Z alongside Noísiu, largely because the actions of such “minor characters”, or their effect upon the sequences in which they are involved, are considered of subsidiary importance in what remains, essentially, a Structuralist argument, favouring the overall at the expense of the particular (ibid.). The strength of formalist theories such as Todorov's lies in the clarity with which even concurrent sequences of events throughout a given text may be delineated, but where analysis of individual characterisation is also of concern to the critic a model of greater potential has been applied, for instance, to several readings of tales from the Medieval Welsh *Mabinogi*, namely *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet* (Byfield 1993) and *Math uab Mathonwy* (Valente 1996). Catherine Byfield, in contrast to Structuralist theorists such as Todorov, argues that assessing characterisation within the *Mabinogi* as a whole is of immense value for the critic seeking to analyse not only the span of the first Four Branches, but the individual structure of each branch, and its potential impact upon an audience. Agreeing with Hildegard Tristram (see below), that distinguishing the narratorial voice of a text's author is an important feature of both plot- and discourse-analysis, Byfield also asserts that the presence of

58 In contrast to Ya and Yb, describing actions set in motion by Conchobor (Y) in the two previous sequences.

the narrator, however minimal, may disguise the lack of psychological motivation exhibited by his manipulation of the text's characters (1993, 52f.). She identifies three techniques to analyse characterisation, each of which may operate interchangeably within the text: authorial (i.e. narratorial) presence, absence, or voice; the physical actions of the character/ actant (corresponding to Todorov's *propositions*), and interplay between them; and the interplay of dialogue on all levels of the text (ibid.; cf. Hanson-Smith 1981–2). The benefits of Byfield's criteria, and their usefulness to the present study, lie in the fact that they may be applied to any given text alongside narratological theory, mitigating the tendency of some theorists, as outlined above, to prioritise generality at the expense of more detailed analyses of individual characters or episodes.

Hildegard Tristram's ongoing analysis of *Táin Bó Cuailnge* has also redefined several critical linguistic terms within a Celtic context (e.g. 1999, 2009). Central to the most recent addition to this body of work is the distinction made between 'narrated time', the "perceived historical time or the setting of events which are told of in a narrative" (e.g. the "end of the fifth age of the world and the beginning of the sixth", in the case of *Táin Bó Cuailnge*), and the 'time of narrating', defined as "the historical situation in which a narrative is composed and [...] its function within that particular situation" (2009, 32). Whilst the distinction may appear obvious, its acknowledgement of the cumulative layers of a particular tale, rather than contextualising its 'narrated time' alone, is of immense importance to the critical analysis of Early and Medieval Irish material, for which the period of time elapsing between a text's composition and its earliest extant record is often protracted, and may also have been subject to successive reinterpretation within widely-diverse milieus (e.g. the social and/ or cultural context of Revivalist versions of Deirdre's 'biography' versus Keating's *Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach*, or the earliest text of LMU from LL; see 4, below).

Tristram's re-readings of *Táin Bó Cuailnge* also reclaim several examples of terminology more commonly utilised by English-language literary critics (cf. Martin 1975–6, as above), in addition to outlining their worth for contemporary scholars of medieval literature (cf. Vitz 1989; Fludernik 1996). Tristram's delineation of mimesis, for example, moves away from the simple equation of art, and narrative as an artistic form, with an "imitation of aspects of the universe" (Abrams 1960, 8f.),⁵⁹ in favour of its application to aid the assessment of internal narrative devices within an individual text (e.g. *Táin Bó Cuailnge*). This form of mimesis, occurring within a tale and not in relation to the surrounding society it might otherwise be seen to represent, is defined by Tristram as the "verbal act of 'imitating' or 'showing' the events and actions of the text,

⁵⁹ The universe of a given text is the society in which it was produced, external to the text itself; cf. Ó Cathasaigh 1984, 296.

[which] occurs when a narrator presents the narration as if it were not mediated by his use (i.e. choice) of words”, e.g. through a character's direct speech. This may be presented in either first-, second-, or third-person form (1999, 266). Essentially, Tristram's redefinition refers less to what the situation of a text might be thought to signify in terms of its (potential) reflection of that text's external society, than to the extent of an author's presence within the text he has constructed. Denying this presence through mimetic devices, the author asserts himself through use of diagesis, an alternative device by which narratorial voice may be detected through, variously, third person narratives, descriptions, reports of indirect speech, or transparent comment upon a character or situation within the text (e.g. Mael Fothartaig within *Fingal Rónáin*, deemed “*mac is amru tánic Laighiu riam*”, the 'most famous son that ever came to Leinster' [Greene 1955, ll.3–4]).⁶⁰ A predominance of third-person narration, as opposed to first or second, has the effect of distancing an audience from the text in question. Mimetic narrative, Tristram concludes, is “emotionally closer to the audience”, and anticipates their most likely response (1999, 266).

Mimesis and diagesis are both forms of what Tristram terms 'functional narratology',⁶¹ i.e. “the use to which narrative discourse strategies [e.g. mimesis and diagesis] are put for the purposes of audience appeal”. Discourse is defined as the “how” of a tale's plot progression, through words, media and narrative style (cf. Barthes 1967, 14–15). Plot itself, the “what” of a given narrative, “constitutes the deep structure of narrative, [whereas] discourse [describes] the surface structure” (Tristram 1999, 264; cf. Chatman 1978, esp. 144f.; Fludernik 1993, 26–32). Tristram's definition of functional narratology provides a particularly suitable method of critical analysis for texts such as *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, LMU or OCU, where more than one recension exists of a tale with the same basic plot, termed by Tristram the 'narrative template'. For LMU, an example of this template is John Francis Campbell's delineation of “a beautiful girl, shut up to baulk a prophecy [...], beloved by an old king, [who] runs away with a family of brothers, and after adventures of many kinds, the story ends in a tragedy” (1872, 19). Different recensions may, however, differ on the level of discourse, the 'how' of plot expression (cf. Herbert 1992, 54). For *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, as Tristram points out, its three recensions do not differ so drastically as to constitute three entirely different texts, yet the considerable variation in plot between LMU and the various Early Modern versions currently corresponding to the title OCU, suggests that the level of discourse between these recensions differs to a much greater extent than those of *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (1999, 265).

60 Further examples of diagetical authorial cross-reference include lists, i.e. use of the so-called watchman device, and *dindsenchus*.

61 'Narratology', in a critical (Celtic) context, is defined as “the scientific study of narrative texts, oral and/ or written”; 'narrative' itself as “the object of narratological research” [i.e. narrative texts, such as those of the Ulster Cycle]; and 'narration' as “the narrative strategies resorted to by the narrator” to assist the progress of his plot and discourse (Tristram 2009, 31).

Several of Tristram's arguments concerning the application of mimesis and diagesis testify to the use of such techniques by a text's narrator, in his identification and promotion of a given text's protagonist(s). A character may be brought to the foreground of the text through the application of several mimetic and diagetical techniques, e.g. the inter-textual devices of flashback (*ordo artificialis*)⁶² and/ or prophecy (id., 267ff; cf. Madelung 1972, 26ff.). A prophetic device, or a similar element such as the *magnímrada* section of *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (Tristram 1999, 268), may be used to prepare the audience for a character's eventual appearance, some time before their activities are physically apparent in the text. Cathbad's prophecy, for instance, announced prior to her birth, not only proclaims Deirdriu's pre-ordained beauty, but advises the audience of the probable conclusion of LMU if his words are ignored: she will bring disaster and death upon the whole of Ulster.⁶³ The prophecy also focuses the audience's attention upon the ultimately devastating contradiction between Deirdriu's beauty and the destruction it is fated to wreak. In the absence, however, of an indication as to whether Deirdriu herself will be held responsible for the consequences of that beauty, it is unclear from the start of LMU whether or not the author intends his audience to be sympathetic to its characters, or the experiences they undergo. Due to the similar absence of internal exposition, e.g. personal soliloquy, the audience's means of assessing the author's attitude towards his characters is dependent upon his utilisation of narratorial technique, and his selection of devices, such as the prophecy which proclaims Deirdriu's, and Ulster's ultimate fate, even prior to her birth.⁶⁴ Other manifestations of inter-textual technique include dreams interpreted by subsequent events within the text, or through a character's own exposition (e.g. Deirdre's vision of the headless sons of Fergus in OCU; cf. 4 1.4, below), or oaths sworn by a certain actant which convey the expectation that future events will be dictated by the subsequent pursuit of their oath's fulfilment. Margaret Madelung, in addition to the device of prophecy ('foreshadowing'), identifies similar narratorial techniques: 'anticipation in retrospect' – encompassing "clues and hints perceived as foreshadowings only when recalled" (1972, 26) – repetition; comparison; and qualification, i.e. the use of phrases such as 'people say', or 'it is said that', as justification for a written source referring to an alleged accretion of oral tradition (id., 31ff., 47–64, 149ff.). In an Irish context, a list of inter-textual techniques should also include the employment of *gessa* as motivational tools. Such devices of intent, as Anne Heinrichs terms them (1976, 132), appear to testify to the absence of free-will as a concept applicable to the characters of an Early Irish tale.

Preparations for a character's appearance within the text may also be accompanied by the use of

62 Distinct from *ordo naturalis*, a chronological order of events.

63 Madelung (1972, 18–26) also refers to this device as 'foreshadowing'; cf. Heinrichs 1976, 132ff.

64 It is worth noting, however, that actual fulfilment of the events of the prophecy is not made explicit throughout the progression of the text, notably at the time of Noísiu's death, even though his demise, and each subsequent consequence of it, may logically be assumed to occur as a direct result of Cathbad's initial predictions (cf. 3 2.2.5, below).

stock phrases, whose function is to divert and redistribute the audience's attention whenever a narrative does not unfold chronologically. In *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, as Tristram points out (1999, 269), variations of the phrase *imthúsa Ulad trá ní deleantar sund calléic*, 'the doings of the Ulstermen are not described for a while', are employed throughout the text. The chief purpose of such a phrase, she suggests, is to assist the arrangement of parallel strands of a complex plot. In a text the length of LMU, however, this particular device is largely unnecessary: apart from the period of time spent by the exiles in Scotland, when Conchobor's warriors contemporaneously discuss the absence of the *maic Uislenn* from amongst their company, there are no parallel episodes to be managed. The greater incidence, however, of parallel or non-chronological episodes within OCU, may be seen to necessitate a similar use of auxiliary devices through which the ongoing narrative is handled. During the return journey to Ireland, for example, upon several occasions Deirdre falls behind the others, falls asleep, and dreams a dream from which she awakens to reveal its content to her companions. Their dismissal of these visions, and of her subsequent interpretations of their import, motivates the narrative to its next stage, foreshadowing the course of events once the party has arrived in Ulster.

The use of such discourse strategies also testifies to the presence of the authorial narrator within his text, whether this is obvious or circumspect. A text's metatexture – the extent to which its author's first-person narratorial presence is apparent, even when it forms no other part of the narrative – may also be maintained by the employment of several techniques. With *Táin Bó Cuailnge* as her point of departure, Tristram identifies amongst its various rescensions five types of discourse strategy, one diagetic and four mimetic. The prevalence of mimetic technique, she argues, testifies to the respective authors' desire to sustain audience involvement and interest throughout the complicated length of the text (1999, 269f.). These five strategies are distinguished as follows: –

Diagetic:

I (id., 269–70): An overt admission by the authorial narrator to his presence within the text, in the form of descriptions, lists, reported speech, or third-person narrative.

Mimetic:

I (id., 270–72): The metatextual presence; a concealed omniscient voice. Also employed through cross-reference, either inter- or intra-textual.

II (id., 272): Mediation of characters' prose speeches, e.g. through complex grammatical and stylized formations.

III (id., 273): Use of intercalated verse passages.

IV (id., 273): Use of rhetorical speech, i.e. half prose, half verse passages, occasionally with “deliberately opaque” meaning.⁶⁵

Distance from, or proximity to, an audience is thus assured by the level of authorial presence, depending upon the narratorial technique(s) employed. Tristram concludes:

“The greatest distance is manifest in the narrator's metatextual, anti-illusionist pronouncements or his 'intrusions' into his narration [diagetic I]... [L]ess distanced is the narrator's third-person narration, which presents the text as part of the cultural memory shared by both his audience and himself [mimetic I]. The prose dialogues take in a middle position between narrative distance and emotional closeness [mimetic II]. In spite of their stylized speech they aim at fictional realism. The verse speeches affect the audience more intensely than the prose ones because of their more immediate aesthetic appeal [mimetic III]... [T]he [rhetorical] speeches and dialogues create the greatest degree of affective closeness [...] brought about by their subcutaneous appeal to the intuitive comprehension of quasi-magical speech [mimetic IV]” (id., 275).

Tristram's conclusions differ from Roland Barthes's comments concerning narratorial presence, which he divides into three strands (1967, 261f.), before rejecting each hypothesis for privileging the characters, as well as the narrator, as if each were a living person (cf. Ellman 2004). He concluded that, if the authorial narrator may be detected embedded within the narrative, this posits between the narrator and his language “a strict complementary relation which makes the author an essential subject, and narrative the instrumental expression of that subject” (Barthes 1967, 261). The comments of Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (1984, 299–300), and Catherine McKenna (1980, 35), echo Barthes's conclusions that a critical inability to differentiate between the inter- and intra-textuality of a given text may lead to that text's individual merits being subsumed beneath, for instance, a relentless search for the origins of a particular motif perceived as common to itself and to a range of similar tales. Both hypotheses, however, undermine the conception of a text as an entity in its own right, whose components might well prove relevant for the critic seeking to contextualise the wider occurrence of a certain characteristic motif, but for which the organisation of content, character and plot progression within the individual textual unit must, nevertheless, be established first. It is critically unsound to assume that material concerning Deirdriu is necessarily similar or comparable to a wide range of tales – notably, those referring to Mark, Iseult and Tristan (e.g. Cormier 1976–78) – in which a so-called 'triangular' relationship (ageing husband/ younger wife/ youthful lover) is depicted, without first establishing whether or not the internal features of LMU and OCU permit the relationship between Deirdriu, Noísiu and Conchobor to be classified as such. What is required first and foremost is to establish

65 It is unclear whether Tristram intends this definition to include the use of devices of prophecy and foreshadowing, or if these as media through which the audience's interpretation is of greater consequence, are exempt.

the intra-textual relationship of each character/ actant, to each other character, to the purpose of the text and, most importantly, to itself. Does each character develop upon a similar level, or is one promoted at the expense of others – and, if so, does the one thus promoted qualify as the main character or protagonist (cf. 3 2.2.5, below)? – or is each character involved in the progression of a particular text less important as an individual than as a stock figure whose characteristics may be interchangeable with identical characteristics bestowed upon another/ several other figures at various levels of the text?

1.3: The nature of character

Unless a narrative text is seen to constitute a series of concepts alone, without expression or plot development, the portrayal and treatment of its characters, the agents or actants of the text, is of central importance to that text's structure, development and impact upon its audience. The Character, his – or her – actions, his manipulation by the author, and the arrangement of his every deed and speech are devices by which the progress of the narrative may be advanced. Roland Barthes defined each character within a particular narrative by “his participation in a sphere of actions, such spheres being limited in number, typical, and subject to classification” (1967, 258). Various structural narratologists, such as Todorov and A.J. Greimas, have proposed a similar classification of the Character according to the nature of his or her function within the text, e.g.

“the *Sujet*, [who] is the desirer; the *Objet*, the desired, that which or the person whom the Subject desires; the *Adjuvant*, the Helper; the *Opposant*, the Obstacle; the *Destinateur*, the Dispatcher, who gives to the Subject his mission; [or] the *Destinataire*, the Beneficiary” (Vitz 1989, 4).

Both methods of classification constitute a series of paradigmatic oppositions, i.e. “subject/ object, giver/ recipient, adjutant/ opposer”, whence, “since an actant serves to define a class, its role can be filled by different actors, mobilized according to rules of multiplication, substitution, or by-passing” (Barthes 1975, 258). In other words, at any given time throughout the narrative, a particular role may be temporarily enacted by one or more of its characters, before the close of one sequence and the beginning of the next when the roles may be realigned. Yet, as Evelyn Vitz points out, it is not always possible to identify which of the characters enacts a particular role, or whether, in fact, more than one character may be considered to be the subject within a particular scene (1989, 5, 132ff., 176ff.). In the opening section of LMU, for example, upon hearing of the unborn Deirdriu's beauty, Conchobor desires that she should be raised as his companion. He is thus, in Greimasian terms, the *Sujet* within this episode, whilst Deirdriu, “the person whom the subject desires”, is the object. Yet at the same time she is also the beneficiary of Conchobor's desire that she be saved from death, casting him in the role of Helper as well as Subject, frustrating the intention of the *Opposant* – within this episode, the assembled Ulstermen calling for the child to be killed. Deirdriu, in addition, may be read as the object of the Ulstermen's desire

that she be put to death, casting the assembled warriors in another Subject role alongside their status as the main obstacle to Conchobor achieving his desire for Deirdriu to survive. Vitz also argues that the general lack of psychological exposition within medieval narrative renders a particular character's needs or wants, as suggested by their courses of action throughout a narrative, the most effective way to ascertain their importance to that narrative in the eyes of the author. For every desire, she suggests, there will usually be a corresponding *manque*, or lack, which lack precipitates the character's subsequent course of action (id, 98). Conchobor, for instance, wants Deirdriu raised as his companion because he does not have a wife, or another object of desire, whilst Deirdriu's mother wants Cathbad to explain the source of the noise emitting from her belly because she herself lacks the understanding of its import. Yet if, at one time or another, almost every character within a given narrative may be designated as the subject within a particular scene, is it possible to identify a main character, or protagonist, of the text as a whole? By what means, furthermore, may such a designation be achieved, and will the process itself effect a productive method of textual analysis?

The range of male characters within LMU encompasses the *maic Uislenn*, Conchobor, Cathbad, Eogan mac Durthacht, Fergus and, within the later tradition, Fergus' sons, as well as various Ulster warriors such as Maine Lámhgharbh, whose brief appearance nonetheless precipitates a decisive event within the narrative (the execution of the *maic Uislenn*; cf. 4 1.3.9, below). The range of female characters, on the other hand, comprises only Leborcham, the unnamed foster mother, and the unnamed woman, Deirdriu's natural mother, from whose belly her screams are heard during the opening scene of LMU. Even in the later tradition no other female characters are introduced, with the exception of 'the Earl of Dún Tréoin's daughter', whose implied connection with Noísiu is noted only in absentia (cf. 4 1.4, below). It is simple to assume, therefore, as so many Revivalist commentators were content to do, that Deirdriu is not only the most significant female character within both LMU and the later tradition, but that her role in both narratives amounts to that of main protagonist, the nexus around which each decisive occurrence throughout the tales' respective plots develops (e.g. Macdonnell 1912, 1913). Reconsideration of the accuracy of this supposition will form the basis of the textual analysis of LMU throughout 3, below, including assessment of the implications for the character, e.g. Deirdriu, who is the Object of more than one other character's intentions. Regarding this occurrence, René Girard advanced the theory that, within any narrative which may be seen to represent a state of "triangular desire"—defined, for Girard, when the affection or simple control of one character is sought by more than one other—the actual object of this dual focus, often a passive, quiescent figure, is of negligible importance in comparison to the active relationship existing between the opposing Subjects (1961, 17). Girard designates the three characters involved in this triangular relationship as the Subject (the first character in the triangle), the Object, and the mediator, whose presence

conditions the Subject into his initial desire for the third party. The application of this thesis to LMU results in a complex series of questions, addressed in greater detail at 3.2.2.3, below.

Another issue, of relevance to the critical analysis of a text's characterisation, arises from Girard's thesis. In a narrative text such as LMU, in which there is little psychological exposition beyond that implied by the characters' words and deeds, analysis of a theoretical situation, such as the implied presence of Girard's triangular process of mediation, is necessarily imposed by the critic, perhaps artificially, with sparse textual support.⁶⁶ The critic may discuss at length, for example, the internal struggles of Conchobor and Noísiu with regard to each other's desire for and possession of Deirdriu, the common object, yet the greater majority of their conclusions will be corroborated only by unsupported nuances, read between the lines of what is explicitly stated by the text itself. Whilst an element of interpretation is inherent in the close-reading of any narrative text's ultimate import, there is, and should be, a difference between critical analysis of the ways in which a given characters' words and deeds have been deliberately organised by their author, and analysis of the type of impact that the author may have intended for the words and deeds of his characters to have upon an audience (as well as that audience's psychological response to the fictional relationships depicted by the text). A cautious approach to textual analysis is advisable for the literary critic:

“characters are supposed to reveal this and that facet of society, this and that type of mode. Subjected to such a process of valuation over a period of time, the imaginary creatures put on weight in significance, look more and more solid and more integrated than their actual appearance in the text would warrant. We therefore credit them with a three-dimensional verisimilitude, although they are phantoms clothed only with words” (Peterkiewicz 1974, 354).

A fictional character, as Maud Ellman notes, has no factual existence outwith the text by which it is defined, except in the creative process of the author directing its movement. Moreover, it has not experienced the physical childhood – except that implied throughout the course of the narrative by the author – necessary for the application of psychoanalytic literary methodology to be effective. Many psychoanalytic commentators, Ellman continues, are, in effect, analysing the text's author, and the nature of his decisions regarding the construction of the text and its characters' relationships, rather than the experience of the characters themselves, whose internal constitution is actually unable to support this process independently (2004, 5). She notes that:

“psychoanalytic criticism often disregards the textuality of texts, their verbal surface, in favour of the Freudian motifs supposedly encrypted in their depths...[O]nly by attending to

66 Cf. Ó Háinle 2004, 129: “the content [of Medieval and Early Modern Irish literature] consisted entirely of recitation of events and actions, with little or no interest being taken in motive, nor hence in character, so that the protagonists were merely what held the sequence of episodes together. Lack of interest in character also reflected the dominant philosophical tendency of the time, interest being focussed [sic] on the nature of Man (what was common, unchanging) rather than on personality (what was individual, subject to change)”.

the rhetoric of texts, to the echoes and recesses of the words themselves, can we recognise the otherness of literature, its recalcitrance as well as its susceptibility to theorisation” (id., 2–3).

Psychoanalytic criticism of this sort – e.g. Tymoczko’s comment that Deirdriu, as a result of a ‘sterile’ childhood deprived of human interaction, “longs for a beloved, one who will be the object of her love and affection” (1985–6, 147) – will be stringently avoided throughout all subsequent analysis and close-reading.

1.4: Statement of theoretical intent for subsequent analysis

The following analysis of LMU and the later tradition of OCU will proceed from the observation of the verbal surface of each text, considering ways in which the speech and deeds attributed to each character during a particular scene advance the progression of the narrative, and suggest the author’s intentions with regard to the arrangement of each figure’s characterisation throughout the overall text. The range of other devices employed by the author to advance the narrative will also be considered, whether or not the author’s attitude is immediately evident from the narratorial techniques utilised throughout. For each scene of LMU⁶⁷ the sequences of events and the overall mood of each one will be classified according to the theoretical principles of Todorov, as followed by Martin in his assessment of LMU (1975–6), in addition to noting the relationship of each episode to the one it proceeds from and provides the basis for, as Monica Fludernik advocates, identifying:

“the initial *incipit*, which introduces the story proper as well as its first episode, [which] is frequently marked by a temporal specifier (*one day, that afternoon*, a specific date) and triggers a narrative past tense. The central part of each story is taken up by a series of narrative episodes [i.e. the *sequences* of Todorov]. Each episode culminates in an *incidence* that occurs on the background of a state [of affairs] or ongoing activity which is called the *setting*. This incidence is an event that impinges from outside onto the setting [...] The episode concludes on a *result* slot which provides closure and serves as a transition to the next *incipit* of the following episode” (1996, 66).⁶⁸

LMU, for instance, commences with the question *cid dia-mboí longes mac n-Uisnig?*, which not only “introduces the story proper as well as its first episode”, but focuses attention upon the ultimate conclusion of each subsequent episode. Specific chronology introduces six of these later episodes, with the phrases *fecht n-and didiu* (twice); *a mboí-seom didiu a óimur int-í Noísi i-mmaig*; *batar for foesamaib céin móir, bliadain di-ssi trá i fail Conchobor*, and etcetera (cf. 3 2.2.1 et. al, below). Following the initial *incipit* within the opening scene of LMU, the first

⁶⁷ The same theoretical process cannot be applied to the witnesses to the later tradition, for reasons outlined at 4 1.2.1, below.

⁶⁸ Corresponding to Todorov’s ‘ideal narrative [structure]’, which “begins with a stable situation that some force disturbs. The result is a state of disequilibrium; the action of a contrary force, the equilibrium is reestablished; the second equilibrium is much like the first, but the two are never identical. There are, consequently, two types of episode in a narrative: those which describe a state (of equilibrium or of disequilibrium [= Fludernik’s setting]) and those which describe the passage of one to another [= Fludernik’s series of incidences]”; Vitz 1989, 150; cf. 202ff.

incidence, the “event that impinges from outside”, may be identified with the scream issuing from the unborn Deirdriu in her mother’s womb. The atmosphere of the feast – the background state of affairs, “ongoing activity” or setting – is shattered, and the ensuing disruption culminates in the discussion between Conchobor and the Ulstermen which determines Deirdriu's fate and decrees, as the result of the episode, that she will be kept in solitude and reared as Conchobor's future companion. This decision “provides closure and serves as a transition to the next *incipit* of the following episode”, when Deirdriu in her solitary enclosure sees her foster father skinning the calf whose appearance presages Noísiu's own.⁶⁹

The relationship of each character to the actions he or she is made to undertake during each episode will also be considered, with a view to ascertaining whether or not a single protagonist of action throughout either text may be identified (whether or not a decision may ultimately be reached, or the suppositions of the Revivalists with regard to Deirdriu's centrality confirmed). The sum of each character's contribution to successive episodes of each text, applying Todorov's *propositions* and *sequences de loi*, will be assessed with regard to each one's ultimate importance to the narratives' progression. Given the limitations of structural, formalist analysis, notably the reductive nature of Todorov's theory with regard, for example, to characters of lesser status such as Ainnle and Ardán, due caution will be exercised throughout (as Martin notes [1975–76, 142], Todorov's *Grammaire* focused primarily upon plot and action, rather than upon character or psychology). Although credence will be given to the classification, exemplified by Greimas, of the possible roles that each actant within a narrative text may embody, with especial regard to the potential interchangeability of these roles, it is clear from the appraisal of the first scene of LMU alone – where there is no actant to embody the role of *Destinateur*, or dispatcher, the one who gives to the Subject his mission – that it is not conceivable for the characters within each episode to represent the full range of each theoretical framework. Focus will be placed, instead, upon the interplay between characters within each scene, the extent of the authorial narrator's presence/absence from the text, and the interplay of dialogue on all levels, observing Tristram (2000), and Byfield (1996).

69 Fludernik concludes that the “representation of human experience is the central aim of narrative, and it can be achieved both by means of the low-level narrativity of action report and by a variety of telling, viewing and experiencing patterns in sophisticated combination” (1996, 55).

Chapter Three

Deirdriu in the early tradition

Synopsis

This chapter will outline: editions of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, and their respective editors' editorial policies; the episodes of the text; analysis of each consecutive episode, complete with commentary; a summary of the composition of the text, and of the characterisation of Deirdriu; Deirdriu's influence upon *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*.

1: Re-statement of intent for chapter

1.1: Manuscripts and editions of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* for subsequent analysis

The evaluation of LMU will proceed according to the conclusions of 2, 1.4, above, with Vernam Hull's edition (1949) providing the base text for analysis. The intention remains to treat LMU as an individual strand of narrative which, inasmuch as OCU may constitute its indirect development, will be analysed initially as an independent unit of text. The following chapter will assess the narrative of LMU according to its textual, linguistic and characteristic merits, in addition to assessing its relationship with *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*, another tale in which Deirdriu's relationship with Conchobor is referred to. Ultimately, conclusions will be drawn regarding the depiction of Deirdriu within the earliest extant sources in which a character of this name occurs, prior to the exploration (in 4, below) of the development of that depiction throughout the later tradition.

2: *Longes mac n-Uislenn*

Prior to analysing the episodes of LMU, the editorial principles of Vernam Hull's edition, and those of his precursor, Eugene O'Curry, will be assessed.

2.1: The editorial principles of Hull and O'Curry

Introducing his 1949 edition of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, Hull states his intention to provide "a critical edition of the earlier version [of the 'Deirdre tale', i.e. LMU] based upon all the extant copies" of the text: TCD H.2.18 [LL], TCD H.2.16 [YBL] and BM Egerton 1782. Two other transcripts, both eighteenth-century copies of the text from Egerton 1782, are excluded from consideration since, Hull concludes, "they obviously possess no independent authority for the establishment of the correct readings" (1949, 3–4). His subsequent filiation of the three principal manuscripts concludes that LL "represents one branch of the stemma, whereas Y[BL] and E[gerton] together represent a second branch", suggesting "two independent lines of descent from the archetype" (id., 7). Three comparative tables (id., 8–9), demonstrate the evidence for these assumptions based upon, respectively, instances where readings of YBL and Egerton agree

with each other against readings of LL; where YBL and Egerton exhibit errors in common with each other, but absent from LL; and instances where readings in Egerton deviate from those within LL and YBL, explicable “only on the assumption that E[gerton] must derive from an immediate ancestor which introduced a series of changes in the exemplar common from Y[BL] to E[gerton]” (id., 9). Hull labels this lost ancestor Z, and also identifies three other unrepresented manuscripts whose characteristics, he argues, have informed those of LL, YBL and Egerton:

“O represents the prototext or archetype which no longer survives and which was composed in the ninth or even possibly in the eighth century. X [...] indicates the revised version of O; from this now lost redaction, made approximately at the beginning of the eleventh century, L[L] is directly descended. P [also lost] exemplifies, however, a different tradition from that of L[L]: it is the common exemplar of the two extant MSS, Y[BL] and E[gerton], except that E[gerton] derives indirectly from it through the intermediary Z...” (id., 10).

These relationships are illustrated by the stemma below (Figure 1). Accordingly, Hull's critical edition of LMU is based upon LL and, only where required, upon a reconstituted text of X, constructed from readings in either YBL or Egerton which also agree with the text in LL, “for the only connecting link [of the latter MSS] with L[L] lies through X, via P” (id., 10). LL, despite its occasional defects, is respected as the eldest extant manuscript containing LMU in any form.

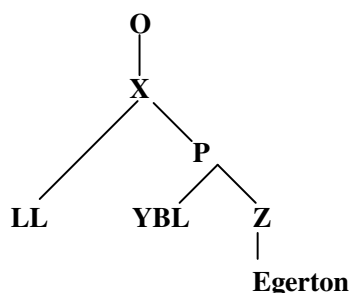


Figure 1: stemma depicting the filiation of MSS. LL, YBL and Egerton (Hull 1949, 9)

Hull's edition does not attempt to reconstruct the text of O, a policy which, he considers, would “go far beyond the evidence afforded by the three [surviving] MSS”. In addition to this conservative approach, he exhorts those seeking to criticise the occasional combination of Old and Middle Irish forms resulting from its application to remember that:

“just such inconsistencies were inherent in the work of the eleventh-century redactor; for, among other things, his revision included the partial modernization of the language, [and] the introduction or perpetuation of various grammatical errors. [S]uch being the situation, to present a uniformly consistent text would be to give a totally false impression of his redaction, and it is, after all, only his redaction [i.e. X] that can be constituted on the basis of the surviving MSS” (id., 10–11).

Hull's editorial consistency, and the intricate grammatical exposition of his text, inspire the confidence of the scholar as well the general reader. Howard Meroney commented that his

edition is “an expert’s throughout – in proofs of date, in recording of text, and in learned annotation” (1952, 62).⁷⁰

In comparison, Eugene O’Curry’s treatment of LMU (1862)⁷¹ inspires less confidence. His text, characteristic of its time, is remarkable for its lack of attention to editorial principles, beyond O’Curry’s unsubstantiated statement that the text of YBL has been preferred to that of LL, as the basis of the printed text, due to its “more correct” grammar (id., 377). No further attention is paid to the relationship between LL and YBL, despite O’Curry’s criticism of this deficit in the work of earlier scholars such as Theophilus O’Flanagan (id., 377), nor to the filiation of either manuscript with Egerton 1782, and the potential exemplar(s) of all three. O’Curry claims that his revised text constitutes a “true representation of the original”, a similarly-undefined term (id., 377–8). He also appends two extracts, described as fragmentary continuations of LMU, describing the situation in Ulster after Deirdriu’s death. Both of these fragments are actually excerpts from *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne* (Stokes 1903; Breatnach 1980; cf. 2.4, below). The first extract occurs later in YBL (cols. 880–1; LMU begin at 749), and the second within the *Book of Ballymote* (RIA 23 P. 12, fol. 141). The relationship between these fragments and LMU is unacknowledged by O’Curry, who makes no obvious connection between the similarity of circumstances of the end of LMU within YBL, and the beginning of the alleged fragment (i.e. *Tochmarc Luaine*), in which Conchobor is introduced as having lacked a wife since Deirdriu’s death occurred. It would appear that O’Curry regarded the later section of YBL (also describing Deirdriu’s children; cf. 2.4, below) as an accidental interpolation, stating of the same section in the *Book of Ballymote* (again, an excerpt from *Tochmarc Luaine*) that it is a “detached fragment of The Fate of the Children of Uisnech” (1862, 416).

Although O’Curry’s English translation provides a fairly literal rendition of the Irish text, and does not introduce material extraneous to the structure of the text in YBL (other than the extracts from *Tochmarc Luaine*), his inattention to general editorial principle renders his edition of LMU unsuitable as the basis for close textual analysis. Unless otherwise stated, therefore, subsequent reference to, or quotation from, LMU refers to Hull’s edition (1949) alone.

2.2: The episodes of *Longes mac n-Uislenn*

B. K. Martin’s analysis of LMU identifies two narrative sequences within the text (1975–76, 143–44). The second of these sequences is classified as embedded, taking place at the same time as certain episodes within the first (e.g. the *maic Uislenn* join the retinue of the king of Scotland,

70 Máire Herbert’s summation of LMU disagrees with Hull on several points of date; see Herbert 1992, 60; cf. 2.2.1, below.

71 As 1 2.4, above.

whilst their absence from Ulster is discussed, concurrently, back in Ulster at Conchobor's court). Within this embedded sequence five narrative *propositions* are identified, whilst a further seven are defined within Sequence I, upon either side of the embedded episodes. Martin's *sequences* and *propositions* observe Todorov's theory of structural textual analysis (cf. 2.1.2, above). For the majority of episodes within the text of LMU, a satisfactory delineation is achieved as a result of Todorov's theory being applied: the actions of each actant, in relation to those of each other actant, are succinctly organised, whilst maintaining notice of their complexity. Martin's description of the scene in which Deirdriu and Noísiu meet and arrange to depart Ulster, for example, is as follows:⁷²

→ Xb // XZ B // XA⁷³

"Deirdre prefers Noise [sic] as a lover (XZ B) and finds happiness (XA); but in eloping with Noise she offends Conchobor both as man and as king (Xb)" (1975–76, 143).

Once again, → indicates that this situation proceeds directly from the one before, and // that each interaction occurs concurrently with the other two, in response to the same misdeed, i.e. Deirdriu's request that Noísiu remove her from Conchobor's jurisdiction. A indicates Deirdriu's happiness, arising from her meeting with Noísiu, with B also defined as "être en rapport sexuel" by Martin (id., 143), whilst b denotes the misdemeanour, or 'méfait', encapsulated by Deirdriu's perceived display of autonomy in defiance of her existing seclusion, and status as Conchobor's favourite. Deirdriu's propositioning of Noísiu affects the scene's three participants simultaneously, a result which Todorov's system of classification neatly expresses, at the same time as denoting the importance of Deirdriu's actions to the overall structure of the episode. By implication, cumulative episode summations arranged in the same manner will also establish the contribution made by each character's actions, scene by scene, to the general structure and progression of the text. Accordingly, a structural summation of character activity will be provided, for each section of the text explored below (2.2.1–2.2.7).

It is regrettable, however, that Martin's analysis of LMU is limited to the delineation of Conchobor's, Deirdriu's and Noísiu's narrative *verbes* alone [= a, b, c, actions, misdeeds and retributive punishments]. No other characters' actions are considered, or seen as potentially influential to the overall construction of the narrative. Accordingly, whilst the basic *sequences* outlined by Martin will be adhered to – i.e. Sequence I, proceeding from Deirdriu's birth until her death, with Sequence II embedded between the exiles' departure for Scotland and their return – due consideration will also be given to each character within a particular episode, however minor their role might initially appear. (Throughout the following analysis, Martin's episode descriptions will be noted in italics, subject to emendation, and his denotation of actants, e.g. X =

⁷² As at 2.1.2, above, X represents Deirdriu, Y Conchobor, Z Noísiu

⁷³ It is possible that Martin accidentally omitted '// Xb' from the end of this list, given that he is careful to delineate Conchobor's mood as such in the following summary

Deirdriu, will be retained for ease of cross-reference). Consideration will also be given to the surrounding structure of each episode, to the extant types of discourse strategy (cf. 2 1.2, above), and to the narrative *verbes* of each character within a given episode which precipitate plot-progression in a subsequent scene (e.g. identification of *incipit*, *incidence* and *setting*).

*Note: Martin identifies four episodes within Sequence I prior to the start of Sequence II, with three more following, whereas the present author describes three scenes within Sequence I prior to the departure from Scotland, i.e. the single embedded episode, and four upon the exiled party's return. Consequently, as noted, certain of Martin's original episode summations may overlap, or be applied to more than one, of the delineations made below, e.g. present S[equence] I, E[episode] 3 = Martin SI, Es 3 and 4, whilst other delineations made below (Figure 2), have no counterpart within his assessment (e.g. SI, E2): –

Sequence	Episodes	
	Revised delineation	Martin (1975–76, 142–3)
I – in Ulster	1 – birth/ prophecy [I, II] 2 – upbringing 3 – departure [I, II; III (embedded); IV]	1 – prophecy 2 – Conchobor's desire for Deirdriu 3 – departure 4 – Conchobor's desire for revenge
II (embedded) – in Scotland	1 – service with <i>Rí Alban</i> 2 – <i>Rí Alban</i> desires Deirdriu [Embedded] 3 – the Ulaid send word to Scotland	5 – Noísiu's flight with Deirdriu 6 – Noísiu's heroism in Scotland 7 – <i>Rí n-Alban</i> desires Deirdriu 8 – flight from king's desire 9 – flight from Scotland
I (resumed) – in Ulster	4 – death of the <i>maic Uislenn</i> 5 – Fergus' return to Emain 6 – Deirdriu's lamentation and death	10 – Conchobor's deception of the <i>maic Uislenn</i> 11 – death of Noísiu; sorrow of Deirdriu 12 – death of Deirdriu

Figure 2: filiation of sequence/ episode pagination

Throughout the following episode-analyses: - **X** = Deirdriu; **Y** = Conchobor; **Z** = Noísiu; **U** = the Ulstermen; **Fe.** = Feidlimid; **Se.** = Sencha mac Ailella; **M** = Deirdriu's mother; **Ca.** = Cathbad; **Fo.** = *aite na ingine*, Deirdriu's foster-father; **L** = Leborcham; **Ai.** = Ainnle; **Ar.** = Ardán; **Ex.** = the persons departing with the *maic Uislenn* from Ulster; **W** = *Rí Alban*, the king of Scotland; **Ws** = his warriors; **S** = his steward; **F** = Fergus mac Róich; **D** = Dubthach; **E** = Eogan mac

Durthacht; **Fi.** = Fiachu mac Fergusa; the narrative *verbes* **a** = 'modifier la situation'; **b** = 'accomplir un méfait'; **c** = 'punir'; **A** = the attribute 'happy, fortunate'; **B** = 'être en rapport sexuel'; **C** = 'heroic' (cf. 2 1.2, above).

It should be noted that five further characters, Cormac mac Conchobor (LMU ll. 169, 192), Mane mac Conchobor (l. 193) Fiachna mac Feidelm ingine Conchobor (l. 194), and Traighren mac Traiglethan and his unnamed brother (ll. 195–96), are mentioned within the text but perform no significant actions. They are consequently omitted from the above key, as their presence cannot be described during any point of the text by active narrative *verbes* a, b or c (passive actions will be noted below; for Mane mac Conchobor, cf. 2.2.6, below). Use of **N** indicates the presence of the narratorial voice within the text.

2.2.1: Birth, prophecy and naming [Sl, El i, ii; ll.1–84]

1. (X -A) *pred.* “It is predicted that Deirdriu will be unfortunate (-A), i.e. that she will be a source of misfortune to others” (Martin 1975–76, 143).

Due to Martin's (and general Todorovian) neglect of the allegedly minor characters of LMU, all reference to Cathbad, Feidlimid, Deirdriu's unnamed mother, and the assembled Ulstermen is absent from Martin's description of the opening scene. Only the impact of Cathbad's prophecy concerning Deirdriu is addressed [X -A], without further reference to his person. The omission of the Ulstermen suggests, misleadingly, that the scene commences only with Conchobor's appropriation of Deirdriu, and that only their interaction has any significance within the scene's duration (or, alternatively, that no other characters operate within its confines). Neither the king nor the (initially unborn) child make their appearance until several other events have occurred, with the assembled Ulstermen being the first characters whose actions impinge upon the course of the narrative (ll.2–5).⁷⁴ As they feast in the house of Conchobor's *scélaige*, Feidlimid [= *setting* I], food and drink are circulated, and the Ulstermen utter *gáir mesca*, a 'drunken shout' (l.5), presumably content in their carousal [UA]. Feidlimid's heavily-pregnant wife attends to the host. At the close of the evening, the woman crosses the house and her unborn child screams aloud [X a/ X -A] *co-closs fon less uile*, 'so that it was heard throughout the whole enclosure' (ll.7–8), and the Ulstermen gather together in alarm [= *incidence* I, the “event that impinges from outside”; cf. 2 2.4, above]. Sencha mac Ailella calls for the woman to be brought forward to explain the cause of the disturbance [Se. a; *setting* II], and her husband Feidlimid expresses fear [Fe. -A] that the noise signifies impending terror (ll.10–19). The woman is unable to identify the cause of the disturbance herself, *ar nád-fitir ban-scál/ cía fo brú bī*, 'because a woman does not know/ whatever is wont to be in [her] womb' (ll.27–28), and requests [M a] the assistance of Cathbad, a

⁷⁴ As noted at 2.1, above, all line references are to Hull 1949 (unless otherwise stated).

renowned seer (ll.20–23). Cathbad prophesies [Ca.a; *incidence* II] that the unborn child will be a girl of great beauty, *dia-mbiät il-ardbe/ eter Ulad erredaib*, 'for whom there will be many slaughters/ amongst the chariot-fighters of Ulster' (ll.38–39). As Cathbad places his hand upon the woman's belly the child reverberates beneath it, confirming his worst fears of her future character [X -A]: *biaid olc impe*, he says, 'concerning her there will be evil' (ll.53–54). The name by which the girl will henceforth be known is bestowed upon her by Cathbad: Deirdriu, literally, 'one who resounds/ causes resonance' [= *derdrethar*]. Shortly afterwards, Deirdriu is born, and a more detailed prophecy concerning her future impact upon Ulster is made (see below). The Ulstermen, alarmed at Cathbad's words [U -A], call for Deirdriu's destruction [U a = *result* of *incidences* I and II], but their wishes are forestalled by Conchobor's intervention, and by his decision that she will be raised apart [= *incipit* II], according only to his will, until such time as she might reach a suitable age to become the 'woman in his company' (ll.81–84). The implicit objections of his warriors (l.84, *nira-lāmatar Ulaid a chocert immi*) suggest that Conchobor's refusal to entertain their misgivings constitutes a misdemeanour [Y b], the repercussions of which will unfold for the remainder of the text (cf. Herbert 1992a, 55).

(UA) X a [X -A]

→ S a // Fe. -A // M a

→ Ca. a [X -A]

= (U -A) Y b

*Note: a given episode's *incipit*, where represented by the actions and/or mood of a particular character or group of characters, will be shown within brackets, as the basis for subsequent intrusions. For ease of reference the child, even prior to its birth and naming, is referred to as X [= Deirdriu].

Commentary

The opening line of the text, i.e. *cid dia-mboí longes mac n-Uisnig?* 'for what cause [was] the exile of the Sons of Uisliu?' represents its initial *incipit*, the element which "introduces the story proper as well as its first episode" (Fludernik 1996, 66). The audience may assume that not only have the persons in question already been displaced from their original location, presumably as a result of events within the subsequent text, but that the cause of their departure is of significant, if not foremost, importance to the mind of the present narrator (the line also corresponds to Tristram's definition of Mimetic [discourse] I, the "concealed omniscient voice", whose narration "presents the text as part of the cultural memory shared by both his audience and himself" [1999, 275]). The prominence apportioned to the *maic Uislenn* accords with other, external, references to their martial prowess and the treacherous nature of events leading, ultimately, to their deaths as

a consequence of exile, attested by several sources extant prior to the inclusion of LMU within LL (cf. 1 1.2, above).

Cornelius Buttimer (1994–5, 2–8) has stressed the importance within this episode of various dramatic sounds intruding upon the status quo, notably the cry uttered by the Ulstermen during their carousal at the opening feast, and the scream of the woman's unborn child from her womb (a third dramatic sound, the cry escaping from the *maic Uislenn* prior to their departure from Ulster, is discussed at 2.2.3, below). The child's cry presumably indicates its distress or discomfort, hence the designation of its mood as negative [X -A],⁷⁵ whilst the Ulstermen's exclamation appears to personify their current optimism [U A], and the “largesse and opulence” of their entertainment at Feidlimid's house – the disturbance engendered by the intrusive shriek being, therefore, all the greater (id., 4). Buttimer suggests that this opening episode is representative of the “euphony and cacophony” contrasted subsequently throughout the text, an element “unlikely to be accidental”, given the preponderance of significant “aural imagery” at the commencement of “several other tales [e.g. *Buile Shuibhne* and *Táin Bó Regamna*] with a less than auspicious outcome” (id., 6; also noting the importance generally attached to infants, like Deirdriu, said to exhibit precocious powers of speech; cf. 1 4.3.2, above).

The characters' speeches throughout the episode also exemplify sound and noise, as well as representing aspects of narratorial presence and discourse strategy (cf. Tristram 1999, 2009). Of the seven characters whose words are heard during the first scene, two persons' utterances – Cathbad's (ll.30–80), and Conchobor's (ll.81–83) – are of decisive importance to the progression of the narrative, whilst no words are uttered without auxiliary significance to the rest (in addition to the non-verbal cries of the Ulstermen and the unborn Deirdriu). Following the narrator's rhetorical opening enquiry (see above), and the *gáir* of the feasting guests, the first words spoken are Sencha's, calling for calm in the aftermath of the warriors' consternation at Deirdriu's screams (ll.10–11). His words are described as the 'issue of a proclamation' (*is and ad-ragart*), requesting Feidlimid's wife to be called to account for the behaviour of her unborn child.⁷⁶ In response, the pregnant woman is brought before the company, and Feidlimid reiterates Sencha's request that the unsettling sounds should be explained, as they have filled him with foreboding (ll.14–19). He is the first to employ the term *derdrethar* (l.14), which will be of such significance for the child named from its implications and those persons surrounding her (cf. Buttimer 1994–5, 7). Feidlimid's wife, thus called upon, speaks next, but, in contrast to the certainty of her husband

⁷⁵ The ultimate import of the child's cry upon the Ulstermen suggests that ‘U –A’ would be equally appropriate. Buttimer's analysis omits mention of the fact that the motif of the screaming child is not found in LL, the earliest account, but only in YBL and Egerton (Bruford 1969, 103).

⁷⁶ Buttimer (1994–5, 6) notes that Sencha's usual role within the Ulster Cycle is one of pacification during such times of unrest.

and Sencha, she expresses only confusion regarding the source of the noise, and is explicit in her somewhat defensive declaration that a woman cannot be expected to possess awareness of the ways in which her body functions (ll.21–29). In consequence, it is Cathbad whose famous wisdom must be appealed to, and his reaction is immediate (ll.31–49): the child is a girl whose beauty will be the envy of queens, but her yellow hair, lustrous lips and pearly teeth will bring nothing but disaster upon the Ulstermen, and contention amongst their champions (in spite of the interest of foreign kings [Hull 1949, 81], whose desire for union might ordinarily be considered beneficial for the girl's native *tuath* [l.43]). Cathbad's next words, as his hand rests upon the woman's belly (ll.50–53), confirm the 'resonating' (= *derdrethar*) nature of the prospect he has outlined, and the following verses of his *retoiric* expound upon the specific detail of the prophecy (see below). In response, the Ulstermen call for the child to be killed, but their request is forestalled by the final speech of the episode, Conchobor's statement (= *incipit* II, the introduction to the *setting* of the following scene), that he will take the child himself to raise in seclusion. There is no further dialogue upon the subject, as Buttimer notes (1994–5, 9), although the narrator's comment that *nira-lāmatar Ulaíd a chocert immi*, 'the Ulstermen did not dare to set him right with respect to it' (l.84 = Mimetic [discourse] I, the "concealed omniscient voice"), implies that, but for their unquestioned acquiescence to Conchobor's status as overlord, Deirdriu's death rather than her rescue might well have ensued.

The prophetic *retoiric* uttered by Cathbad constitutes an example of foreshadowing, a 'device of intent' (Heinrichs 1976, 132), by which an audience may be alerted to the imminent incursion of a character 'on-stage', prior to their physical arrival (cf. 2 1.2, above). The prophecy, focusing attention upon the ultimately devastating contradiction between Deirdriu's beauty and the destruction it is fated to inspire, is specific in describing the physical unrest (*is it aimsir gním dremuín/ gēntar íarum i n-Emuín*, 'in your time it is that a violent deed will be performed in Emain' [ll.63–4]), death (e.g. *guín Fiachnai maic Conchobuir*, 'the slaughter of Fiachna mac Conchobor' [l.70]), and general dissension (*biäid ētach cid íar tain/ dot dáig, a bé, for lassair*, 'even afterwards jealousy will be ablaze, o woman, on your account' [ll.59–60]), that will ensue should the child be allowed to survive. A secondary function of such devices of intent is to focus the attention of the text's audience upon the anticipated conclusion of its narrative. Cathbad's words indicate the probable outcome of LMU, should his prophecy be ignored, whereby Deirdriu, as foretold, will bring disaster and death upon Ulster. Immediately after its pronouncement, however, Conchobor overrides the objections of the Ulstermen to the child's continued survival, indicating that little of the threat posed by the ill-starred child is likely to be alleviated. The text proceeds, instead, to expound each consequence of Conchobor's interference.

If the swift rejection of Cathbad's advice provides a suggestive indication for the audience that

the outcome of LMU will be inauspicious – although, in all likelihood, pleasingly dramatic – the editorial attitude towards the subsequent maintenance of the prophetic device is rather less consistent. As Máire Herbert notes, there are significant discrepancies between the substance of Cathbad's prophecy (ll.55–78), and the predictions within it which achieve fulfilment during the latter half of the text (Herbert 1992a, 59–60; cf. Ó Háinle 2008, 450ff.).⁷⁷ Herbert rejects previous suggestions that the prose and *rosc* passages within LMU were composed other than contemporaneously (contra Hull 1949, 83, etc.), yet her alternative explanation of their discrepancies, that the redactor of this version of LMU (i.e. the LL text) was “unconcerned about minor story details” (1992a, 60), is unconvincing. It is more plausible that, at a similar time to the inclusion of LMU within LL, several alternative traditions relating to the *maic Uislenn* and their contribution to affairs within Ulster were in also circulation (cf. 1 1.2, above).⁷⁸ Therefore, the possibility that the LL redaction of LMU was influenced by some of these traditions, otherwise unattested by the text, should be considered (e.g. accounting, perhaps, for the presence of Gerrce mac Illadan within Cathbad's prophetic utterance, when mention of his fate – his death, apparently as a result of Deirdriu's crimes against Conchobor (ll.71–74) – is otherwise omitted).⁷⁹ It is worth noting, however, that within the course of Cathbad's prophecy there is no specific indication that the demise of Eogan mac Durthacht (see below) will occur as a result of the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*.⁸⁰ Nor does it state, in fact, that the brothers themselves will die. Only their exile is foretold, which will take place, in the words of Cathbad, only 'in the time of Deirdriu' (*is it aimsir*), rather than as a direct consequence of her presence in Ulster (ll.61–62). Future events put specifically to Deirdriu's account are as follows: the exile of the *maic Uislenn* (ibid.); the performance of an unspecified violent deed in Emain (ll. 63–64); destruction caused by Fergus mac Roig, seemingly in response to the violent deed (ll. 65–66); the exile of Fergus, and his estrangement from the Ulstermen (ll.67–68); the death of Fiachna mac Conchobuir (l.70); and the deaths of Gerrce mac Illadan (l.72), and Eogan mac Durthacht (l.74). Given that it precedes the destruction of Emain by Fergus, the ‘violent deed’ that will arise may well refer to the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* and of Fergus' son, as these are described within the course of the

77 Ó Háinle's interpretation of this episode will be addressed in 2.2.6, below.

78 This is not restricted to the text of LMU. That the selection of only certain events, from within a larger corpus of material relating to Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn*, was also practised by later redactors is suggested by, for example, Deirdriu's allusion to Noísiu's connection with 'the Earl of Dun Tréoin's daughter', a character otherwise unattested within the extant tradition (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 201 = RIA B iv 1; cf. 4 1.3.9, below).

79 Hull's statement (1949, 88), that Gerrce mac Illadan was “killed by Fergus mac Roig, to avenge the murder of the Sons of Uisliu”, would appear to rely upon the detail of the prophecy alone. It should be noted that the reference to Gerrce's death is also found within YBL and Egerton 1782, a probable indication of the influence of the LL version upon later redactions (as figure 1, above).

80 Ó Háinle (2008, 450) also notes that, “incredibly, no mention is made in [Cathbad's prophecy] of Eoghan mac Durthacht, Naoise's murderer, being killed [in recompense]”. Given his contribution to *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (cf. Ó Rahilly 1976, ll.481–523), it is possible that Eogan's death is not said to have occurred within LMU, itself an alleged *remscél*, although the location of the dialogue between Eogan and Conchobor within the *macgnímrada* might indicate that their conversation, further to/ contemporaneous with the implied arrangements made for Noísiu's death, occurred at a similar time to events within LMU. It is also clear, however, that Eogan's death was associated with circumstances in which neither Fergus, nor the *maic Uislenn*, were involved; (as 1 1.2.1, above).

text (cf. 2.2.5, below), although, of other events put to Deirdriu's account within the prophecy, only the respective exiles of the *maic Uislenn* and of Fergus are actually depicted during the latter half of this particular version of LMU (cf. 2.2.3 and 2.2.6, below). More abstract consequences, i.e. the suffering of the Ulstermen (l.57), and the apparently widespread jealousy arising from Deirdriu's presence in Ulster (ll.59–60), are also predicted.

Only one aspect of the prophecy refers personally to Deirdriu, who will perform, it is said, 'a horrible, fierce deed' (*gním ngrānda ngarg*), committed in anger against the king of Ulster (ll.75–76). Conchobor, whose irruption into the dialogue occurs soon afterwards, is presumably the king in question, yet the nature of the fierce deed itself is unexplored. Only twice during LMU may a physical act committed by Deirdriu be described as more than passive: her assault upon Noísiu's ears during their first conversation (cf. 2.2.3, below), and her transition from a seat in Conchobor's chariot to the position upon the ground in which she meets her death. As a reference to this episode, designation of the fierce deed as committed 'in anger' against Conchobor implies an element of intention not necessarily apparent from the description of her death (cf. 2.2.7, below). The nature of the crime (*bail*), apparently committed by Deirdriu, upon which Cathbad predicts the death of Gerra mac Illadan (l.71), is also unexplored, unless it is the very fact of the 'destiny' (*cin*) also foretold upon her behalf (it is the only indication within this section of the text that Deirdriu's detrimental effect upon Ulster will result from cosmic interference, rather than mere human whim or error; contra Herbert 1992a).

Equally curious is the statement that *biaid do lechtán i nnach dú*, 'your little grave [o Deirdriu] will be in any place' (l.77). Kathryn Stelmach interprets the phrase as an allusion to the "eternal fame of Derdriu within the context of oral tradition [...] through the creation of a tale that will be told endlessly throughout the years. Her story", Stelmach claims, "will in fact garner such great renown that countless places throughout Ireland will claim to be the site of her internment" (2007, 146). Stelmach does not introduce evidence to support her assertion of such *dindsenchus*, and although certain locations, particularly those within the demesne of the Scottish exile of the *maic Uislenn*, have retained some lasting association with the brothers and, to a lesser extent, with Deirdriu (as 1 1.3.4, above; cf. Bevan 1957), there is no particular indication that this was a significant concern of the redactor (emphasis is not, for example, placed within LMU itself upon the burials of either the brothers or Deirdriu following their deaths [e.g. ll.183–190, 316–320]). Stelmach also overlooks the fact that, although the last line of the prophecy alludes directly to the renown which will be accorded the events predicted by Cathbad (l.79, *bid scél n-airdairc*, 'it will be a famous tale'), the allusion, concluding as it does the list of future disturbances put to Deirdriu's account, is more likely to refer to the recollection of her devastating impact upon the warriors of Ulster, rather than upon any lasting legacy of her unfortunate lifespan *per se*. An

alternative interpretation of the phrase may reflect this ambiguity: ‘your little grave will be in any place’, i.e. in a random place/ wherever it is made.⁸¹ A self-conscious attitude of various characters towards the preservation of their earthly status is sometimes apparent during the later tradition, e.g. within OCU, and was certainly a preoccupation of Revivalist authors adapting even the briefest allusions to such concerns within their source material (Stelmach 2007; as 1 2.6, above). An awareness of the potential longevity of eternal fame in recompense for premature death is, however, entirely absent from LMU.⁸² It is only on account of her comely face (*cóem-enech*), that Deirdriu will be ‘fair of fame’ (*cloth-bán*), despite its ultimately negative consequences (l.56). Rather, Cathbad’s reference to Deirdriu’s ‘little grave’ might be intended to underline the longevity of the disruption to Ulster engendered by her presence, even following her own burial, parallel to his earlier statement that it is ‘during her lifetime’, as an immediate consequence of her birth, that the Ulstermen will begin to suffer (l.57).

With the exception of the ‘fierce deed’ that will be performed against him, Conchobor is only indirectly associated with the devastating effects of Deirdriu’s presence upon Ulster (notwithstanding the impending loss of Fiachna mac Conchobuir, presumably his son; cf. Ó Háinle 2008, 450–51). As king of Ulster, Conchobor might be expected to eschew the company of persons, like Deirdriu, with the potential to cause such serious harm to his warriors, yet his immediate reaction to Cathbad’s words is to assume responsibility for the ill-starred child himself (ll.81–83), as if the mere fact of his custody will neutralise her threat. His position of authority appears to prevent the Ulstermen from voicing what would, in the circumstances, have been reasonable objections to the child’s continued existence, against the narrator’s implication that they would have attempted to do so had a person other than Conchobor been the one to interfere (l.84, as above; cf. Herbert 1992a, 56). Conchobor’s reaction to the apparent inevitability of events set in motion by Deirdriu’s birth has been described as a departure from the “cautious circumspection” with which his relationship with Cathbad is ordinarily associated (Buttimer 1994–4, 9), and no further reason is suggested for the dramatic rejection of both Cathbad’s counsel, and the disquiet of the assembled warriors. Conchobor’s decision is made, it would appear, solely upon his own behalf, in direct opposition to the future welfare of Emain, and in spite of the threatened ‘fierce deed’ that will be performed against his own person, by Deirdriu, should she survive. It is unclear whether Conchobor’s decision, made without the concern for his kingdom ordinarily expected of a ruler, is an immediate indication of the severity of the effect that Deirdriu’s presence will have upon Ulster, when even its king shall be made careless of his

81 Personal communication, William Gillies, October 2010.

82 *Pace* Stelmach, who claims that the ‘mass of fragments’ made of Deirdriu’s skull within the final scene “simultaneously disallows the decay of her beauty and proscribes any veneration or objectification of her body after death [...] in which the moment of her beauty’s apotheosis is frozen in time with Noísiu’s love” (2007, 150; cf. Tymoczko 1985–6, 153 and 2.2.7, below).

obligations as a result. Were this the case, however, and the prophecy should be seen to exert an influence more important for the arrangement of each character's behaviour than any other aspect of the narrative, one might expect the structure of the text to be focused primarily upon the systematic fulfilment of each consequence to which the prophecy attests. In actual fact, within the course of the text only two of Cathbad's predictions are realised. An alternative interpretation of Conchobor's decision suggests less edifying motives behind his interference, a suggestion strengthened in light of decisions made throughout the rest of the text concerning the *maic Uislenn* and Deirdriu, (e.g. Conchobor's failure to honour the guarantee of safe conduct provided for the exiles' return to Ulster, involving the violation of Fergus' arrangement with the brothers as well as that of the *maic Uislenn* with himself; cf. 2.2.5, below). Máire Herbert describes Conchobor's decision to assume custody of Deirdriu, against the wishes of his warriors and to the detriment of his kingdom's future welfare, as a sin of pride, an "assertion of self, rather than the transcendence demanded by his status [as king]" (1992a, 55). Yet her comment that Conchobor's assumption of responsibility for Deirdriu represents his 'judgement', concerning the threat posed by the girl to Ulster, introduces an element of reasoned decision unsupported by the brevity of the text itself (id., 56–57). Herbert also suggests that Conchobor's decision constitutes a "prideful transgression of the limits of [his] power", but that it is his recognition of the threat posed by the "uncivilised" Deirdriu to the "ordered world of society" into which her prenatal cry so crudely erupts, that inspires his attempt to "neutralize the external element rather than accept it on its own terms". In other words, he takes control of the child in order to bring her "utterly under social domination" (ibid.). Herbert's argument is predicated on the notion that the relationship between a king and the land he rules is facilitated by his concurrent relationship with a goddess of sovereignty (*in flaithius*), the "embodiment both of the physical land and of its dominion" (id., 56; cf. Herbert 1992b; McCone 1990, 108–09). Despite her acknowledgement that, within LMU, Deirdriu is "depicted as a mortal female whose entire lifespan is encompassed within the limits of the story", Herbert suggests that, given the fact that "a social drama about kingship begins with [Deirdriu's] traumatic entry into the world, and ends with her equally traumatic exit", there is necessarily a connection between the girl's person and Conchobor's authority over Ulster (1992a, 56–57). By his appropriation of Deirdriu, Herbert concludes, Conchobor seeks to subvert the "equilibrium" of the relationship of "female/ male, nature/ culture", exemplified by the king-god who mates with the *flaithius*. His appropriation of her upbringing, she argues, testifies to his desire to "achieve a position of dominance of the male principle over the female" (id., 57). Although Herbert is correct to note the correlation between Deirdriu's lifespan and the extent to which her presence affects the well-being of Ulster – including, presumably, the conduct of its king – it is also true, as Herbert herself asserts, that Conchobor's kingship

"pre-existed his possession of Deirdre [sic] and was not dependent on it. Nor does Deirdre's choice of Naoise [sic] effect any transfer of power to the young warrior, [and] Deirdre does

not have the capacity to influence either the outcome of the conflict over her destiny, nor the future of the kingdom of Ulster” (id., 56).

Conchobor's apparent lack of a woman, furthermore, is not a cause for immediate comment at the start of LMU unlike at the beginning of *Fingal Rónáin*, during which the audience is swiftly alerted to the fact that the king of Leinster 'has been without a wife for a long time' (Greene 1955, 1.7). Whilst Conchobor's desire for Deirdriu, perhaps enhanced by the alluring promise of the great beauty foretold for the girl (1.48), may be seen to be motivated by his corresponding *manque*, or lack, of a wife (as 2 1.2, above), it does not suggest that his marital status is otherwise in need of address, nor that his kingdom has suffered in consequence. Conchobor's intention of raising the girl to be the woman 'in his company' does not, in fact, include the intention to make her his wife (11.83, 86–87; cf. Buttimer 1994–5, 27).

The declaration of Conchobor's decision to assume control over Deirdriu's future constitutes the final speech of the episode, and the act which motivates the narrative directly into Episode II [= *incipit* II, the introduction to the *setting* of the following scene].

2.2.2: Upbringing and childhood influences [SI, Ell; 11.85–108]

2. + (XB) opt. Y. “Conchobor wants to make Deirdriu his concubine and has her reared in seclusion” (Martin 1975–76, 143).

Although Martin correctly emphasises the continued importance of Conchobor's decision to raise Deirdriu for himself upon the course of her childhood, the absence of Leborcham from his episode-classification overlooks the most significant misdemeanour [b] committed during the scene (see below).

Conchobor has decreed that the infant Deirdriu will be raised apart, until she is of an age to become the woman in his company [Y a OR Y b, as above, 2.2.1], defining the chronological parameters of the episode (1.83 = *incipit*). She grows to a level of beauty not previously seen in Ireland (11.85–86). The girl is given to the custody of an unnamed foster-father and mother, *i llis fo leith*, ‘in a court apart’ (1.86), from which all persons are denied entry apart from her foster parents, Conchobor, and Leborcham, the *ban-cháinte* whose status prevents her exclusion (11.88–89 = *setting* I). Upon a certain day in winter, Deirdriu's foster-father is engaged in skinning a calf to be cooked for her dinner [Fo. a]. The girl sees its blood upon the snow, and a raven which alights to drink from it, and announces that she could give love to a man bearing the same three colours (11.90–96 = *incidence* I). Leborcham replies that she is aware of such a man, Nóisíu the son of Uisliu, who is even now nearby [L b], and Deirdriu declares that she ‘will not be well’ until she has seen him for herself (11.97–99 = *result* I, presaging the future meeting of

Deirdriu and Noísiu, i.e. the *incipit* of the following episode). Upon another occasion, concurrently or soon afterwards, Noísiu, alone in the environs of Emain, sings aloud [Z a], as a description is rendered of the characters of himself and his brothers [N indicates the presence of the narratorial voice within this episode = Diagetic I; as 2 1.2, above].

(Y b) Fo. a

→ L b // Z a [N]

Commentary

It is unlikely that the Ulstermen quickly forget the presence within their kingdom of the girl for whom such negativity has been prophesied. The isolation in which Deirdriu is raised, therefore, might have been read as a conciliatory gesture upon Conchobor's behalf, designed to reduce the number of persons exposed to her influence, yet his actual motive, once again, protects personal interest alone: the girl is brought up *connach-acced fer di Ulaib cosin n-úair no-foad la Conchobor*, 'in order that no man of the Ulstermen might see her until such time as she should sleep with Conchobor' (ll.86–87). Accordingly, the only persons within her acquaintance between her birth, and the time of her meeting with Noísiu, are her foster-father and mother, whose identity is neither revealed nor discussed,⁸³ Conchobor⁸⁴ and Leborcham, whose access to Deirdriu, it would appear, is against Conchobor's wishes, but cannot be prevented for fear of her reputation as a satirist (the text's stress is placed upon her status as *ban-cháinte* [l.89], the 'woman of words', whose judgements upon others normally result in the shame and disgrace of the one insulted; Ó Cathasaigh 1986; Kelly 1988, 49–51; Bruford 1996, 67–68). As Maria Tymoczko has noted (1985–6, 151), the influence of Leborcham upon Deirdriu's perception of the power of words, and the power of shame, is suggested by the girl's first conversation with Noísiu, and by her insistence that he should comply with her request or accept the consequences (cf. 2.2.3, below).

Considerable significance has been attached to the description of the calf's death in the snow, and the desire for a man which this death awakens in Deirdriu, e.g. the pertinent comments of Tymoczko upon Noísiu's relationship to the slaughtered animal, in which Deirdriu's attraction to the tableau formed by the skinned creature, the snow and the raven:

“underscores [her] fatalism, for the object that invokes Deirdriu's desire is a *dead* calf, a *dead* 'beloved'. A young woman whose desire is awakened by a slaughtered animal whose blood feeds a carrion crow is indeed worthy of Cathbad's terrible prophecies, [just as] the imagery

83 LMU lacks the intensive debate surrounding the choice of suitable foster-parents found, for example, within *Compert Coin Culaind*; cf. Deane forthcoming.

84 It is worth noting that none of Conchobor's presumed visits to the girl's enclosure are described by the text; the first words exchanged between the pair occur only after Noísiu's death has occurred; cf. 2.2.6, below.

here prefigures Noísiu's death. Just as the calf is slaughtered unawares and undefended in the foster-father's enclosure, so Noísiu is the beloved who comes to be slaughtered treacherously, unawares in Conchobor's *les*. [Deirdriu] too becomes a slaughtered beloved [at the end of the story], a dead favourite" (1985–6, 148; author's italics).

The skinning of a calf, within a predominantly agrarian society such as medieval Ireland, would be unremarkable, but for the symbolism attached to it, i.e. *incidence* I constitutes Deirdriu's reaction to the colours of the tableau, rather than the tableau itself. The preparation of an animal for human consumption, moreover, is probably a familiar sight to the girl, and even her equation of the colours of its blood, the snow and the raven with red cheeks, white skin and dark hair upon a man whose corresponding colours she might love, is imbued with narrative significance only by Leborcham's response that a person of such appearance is close by (II.97–98). The isolation in which Deirdriu has been brought up – likened by Tymoczko to the environment in which a young animal itself might be raised, awaiting slaughter (1985–6, 150) – has so far precluded that any earlier statements of this kind achieved materiality with regard to a human being within her limited acquaintance. She has learned of the existence of men, and of love, either through Conchobor's own, unattested, visits to the *les*, or through Leborcham's instruction.

Leborcham's response will drastically alter the status quo, i.e. Deirdriu's solitude, with almost immediate effect. Its placement within the text implies that Deirdriu's apparently autonomous decision – probably her first – to meet with the man described by Leborcham, results directly from the satirist's interference. Her (i.e. the narrator's) choice of terminology, the use of *orddan*, 'dignity' and *tocad*, '[good] fortune' in this context (I.97), also contradicts, for an audience, its outward intimation of a conclusion to Deirdriu's pursuit of Noísiu dramatically at odds with the humiliation and calamity which will actually result (and which has already been prophesied, indirectly, by Cathbad). The text lacks further exploration of Leborcham's motives. No indication is provided of the extent of Deirdriu's own knowledge regarding the tenets of the prophecy, or the reasoning behind her isolated childhood. With the exception of the narrator's detailed description of the *maic Uislenn* (see below), this episode lacks even the minimal indications of the characters' moods or responses to the various narrative *verbes* found within the previous episode [e.g. U –A]. It is possible to read Leborcham's role within LMU as an embodiment of the abstract malice predicted for Deirdriu by Cathbad's prophecy, i.e. that but for the interference of the satirist, Deirdriu's solitary confinement would have continued uninterrupted until she was claimed by Conchobor.⁸⁵ The only conclusion which may be drawn from the text itself, with regard to Leborcham's interjection, is that Deirdriu's response to the satirist's imparted knowledge violates Conchobor's decree that no man apart from himself should have sight of or

85 Alan Bruford (1996, 68) comments that Leborcham "visits [Deirdriu] in her hidden foster home because nobody could keep a satirist out of the house, tells her of Noísiu and precipitates the catastrophe, no doubt out of malice; it may well be implied that she also taught Deirdriu the method of blackmail by which she forces Noísiu to abduct her, which seems to involve a threat of satire".

intercourse with the girl during her confinement.⁸⁶ Noísiu's introduction into the narrative, as a manifestation of Deirdriu's previously unfocused desire, depends entirely upon Leborcham's assistance of that violation and, as such, should be regarded as more than coincidental to the progression of the narrative from this point on.

In contrast to the later tradition, Leborcham has no further association with Deirdriu within LMU (at odds with her mediation between Conchobor and the *maic Uislenn* following the return of the brothers and Deirdriu to Ulster; cf. 4 1.3.6, below). Her relationship with Deirdriu in this earliest narrative strand is confined to her introduction of the girl to the fact of Noísiu's existence, which constitutes, in effect, an instance within the narrative of foreshadowing akin to Cathbad's own predictions. Throughout the text, the audience has been alert for further mention of the brothers whose ultimate exile was established by the text's opening line, with the rhetorical question posed concerning the reason for their removal from Ulster (cf. 2.2.1, above). Leborcham's introduction of Deirdriu to the existence of 'Noísiu, son of Uisliu' (l.98) provides the first intimation of a connection between the girl and the brothers' departure from the province (a connection, as we shall see, which may not have been common prior to the composition of LMU itself, despite existing traditions [as 1 1.2, above] concerning the martial prowess of the *maic Uislenn* and their association with Ulster; see 5, below). The narratorial intrusion which follows (ll.100–08) is the first instance of overt commentary [= diagetic I] within the text of LMU. Given that the conclusion of at least one aspect of the brothers' lives is foregone – i.e. their eventual banishment from Ulster – there is deliberate pathos in the descriptions, at this stage of the text, of their competence in arms, skill at hunting and of the 'melodious' (*binn*) voices which delight persons overhearing their song, and increase the yield of the milch cows by two thirds. The brothers' dependence upon each other whilst in contentious situations is also stressed, as is their ability to withstand the onslaught of a force the size of the entire population of Ulster, *acht corro-chuired cách díb a triur a druim fri araile*, 'provided that every one of the three of them put his back against the other' (ll.105–06), rather than stand alone. Buttimer (1994–5, 11) argues that, far from providing merely incidental detail, this description of the physical attributes of the *maic Uislenn* "transcends the outward tokens of the [three-]colour description noted earlier", i.e. by Leborcham's association of Noísiu with Deirdriu's desire for a man of like appearance to the calf's blood, the snow and the raven's plumage. He points out that red, white and black are also the characteristic colours associated with membership of a *fíán*, or warrior-band, an aspect of the brothers' lives celebrated in Early Modern bardic verse (id., notes 46, 108), and should be deemed

86 Given the restriction placed by Conchobor upon those persons that may not catch sight of Deirdriu during her infancy (i.e. l.86, any 'man of the Ulstermen'), it is tempting to speculate whether the origins of the foster-father, whose presence is not only tolerated but arranged to care for the girl during her infancy, should be seen to lie outside the province. His low status, suggested by the fact that he is neither a named warrior nor someone of reputation for prowess like those who care for the youthful Cú Chulainn, might also contribute to the apparent fact that his presence near Deirdriu does not contravene Conchobor's initial decree.

symptomatic of their martial reputation within Ulster.⁸⁷ Buttimer concludes that the choice Deirdriu will shortly make, between Conchobor and Noísiu, emphasises not only the difference in “social category” between the two men, but will also “activate the latent antagonism between king and *fian*” (id., 15). Furthermore, the narrator's glowing depiction of the *maic Uislenn* at this stage of the text, i.e. just prior to their first encounter with Deirdriu, serves not only to heighten the awareness of the audience to the brothers' eventual fate – exile from the place in which they were previously held in such high regard – but also to juxtapose the praiseworthy qualities of the *maic Uislenn* with descriptions of Conchobor's arrogance and self-centred disregard for the welfare of his province thus far. As opposed to his neglect of a king's obligations towards the land he rules, the *maic Uislenn* are said to contribute to its health and fertility simply by opening their mouths (cf. id., 11–12).

This juxtaposition between Conchobor, Deirdriu's current guardian, and the men in whose company she will depart Ulster provides the *setting* for the following episode, whilst Leborcham's introduction of Noísiu into Deirdriu's consciousness provides the ongoing *incipit*.

2.2.3: Proposition and departure [SI, EIII i, ii; iii (embedded); iv; II.109–37]

3. → *X b // XZ B // XA*. “Deirdriu prefers Noise as a lover (XZ B) and finds happiness (X A); but in eloping with Noise she offends Conchobor both as man and as king (X b)” (1975–76, 143).

4. (*YcXZ*) *obl*. “Conchobor is obliged to revenge himself on both Deirdriu and Noise” (ibid.).

5. → *Za*. “Noise modifies the situation (a) by fleeing from Conchobor and taking Deirdriu to Scotland” (ibid.).

Martin's grounds for judging Deirdriu's mood [X A], following her conversation with Noísiu, are unclear, as this episode, like 2.2.2, is sparing with intimations of the characters' responses to their own or others' acts. The most that can be inferred from the text, concerning Deirdriu's mood at the close of the scene, is that it is likely to be more positive than if Noísiu had failed to accommodate her wish to be removed from Ulster (she is not forced to invoke, or to attempt to invoke, the physical consequences promised should he fail to comply, e.g. visiting upon him, as threatened, the 'ears of shame and derision' [see below]). The element of sexual rapport identified by Martin [XZ B] is also ambiguous, and there is a similar lack of indication of Conchobor's response to the departure of the *maic Uislenn*, beyond the statement that it is with 'snares and guiles' (*indlega oculus chelga*) that their subsequent pursuit throughout Ireland is arranged (I.135). Moreover, Martin's assumption that Noísiu 'modifies the situation', by implementing his and

87 Tymoczko's comment (1985–6, 149), that during Deirdriu's lament for the brothers' deaths, Noísiu is described as blonde (I.240), might be seen as a reference to his general fairness rather than to his hair alone, but might also indicate an extraneous detail retained from one of the sources for LMU itself; cf. 2.3, below.

Deirdriu's departure from Ulster, is ultimately unsupported by the text, and constitutes a further example of the detrimental effect to Martin's analysis of LMU of downplaying the role of Noísiu's brothers, Ainnle and Ardán (see below).

This episode follows immediately from the one before. Deirdriu, alerted to Noísiu's existence and apprised of his suitability by Leborcham [= *incipit*], steals out of the *les* at a moment when he is otherwise alone [X a/ X b]. Noísiu and Deirdriu become aware of each other [= *result* of the series of *incidences* within the previous episode, e.g. Leborcham's interference], and begin to converse [= *setting* I]. After he has passed comment upon the fairness of the girl he sees, Deirdriu announces that, given the choice between the man before her and the 'bull of the province' (*tarb in chóicid*), she would choose Noísiu, the *tarbín óag*, 'young bull' (ll.111–15 = *incidence* I). The worrisome nature of this statement, for Noísiu, is indicated by the fact that he immediately invokes Cathbad's prophecy (l.116) as the reason why he cannot entertain its implications: no flattering contrast between himself and Conchobor, but an implicit challenge to the latter's authority. Noísiu refuses her advances [X -A // Z C = *result* I; *setting* II]. Deirdriu expands upon her initial suggestion, making the implications of refusal clearer by grasping hold of his two ears [X a/ X b] and declaring that, unless he takes her away from Ulster, he will be rendered foolish (*dá n-ó méle ocus cuitbiuda in-so*) in consequence [= *incidence* II; see below]. The effect of her words is protracted, encompassing a subsequent conversation between Noísiu and his brothers, in response to the cry of alarm [*andord*] emitted by Noísiu [Z -A = *result* II; *setting* III] following his ordeal, to which the Ulstermen also react with a terror [U -A] similar to their distress upon hearing Deirdriu's pre-natal shriek, 'each man of them arising from the other' (*at-raig cech fer díb di alailiu*). The conversation between the brothers is the third *incidence* of the episode, embedded between the ongoing repercussions of Deirdriu's words to Noísiu, which will result, eventually, in the departure of the *maic Uislenn* from Ulster. Ainnle and Ardán, at first assuming the fault of his outburst to lie with Noísiu (ll.126–27), demand an explanation for his distress [Ai. / Ar. a], insisting that the men of Ulster should not assault each other upon his account. Once Noísiu has outlined 'what had been done to him' (*a ndo-rónad friss*), in spite of the attendant dangers they predict will result from acceding to Deirdriu's demand, the brothers choose to protect Noísiu's honour [Ai./ Ar. C], and decide to depart with the girl for another province (ll.128–30 = *result* III; *setting* IV). Their party, comprising 150 warriors, women, servants and animals, with Deirdriu concealed amongst them, are pursued by the Ulstermen throughout several provinces of Ireland [Y/ U c], in spite of the protections (*fóesama*) of those provinces' respective overlords [= *incidence* IV]. Having made a circuit of the country, the party is finally driven across the Irish Sea, effecting the removal of the *maic Uislenn*, Deirdriu and the rest of their company from Conchobor's jurisdiction [= *result* IV; *incipit* of following episode].

(L b) X b [\rightarrow X b]
 = X -A // Z C // Z -A
 \rightarrow {Ai./ Ar. a [Ai./ Ar. C]}⁸⁸
 \rightarrow Y/ U c
 = X/ Z/ Ai. / Ar/ Ex. a [-A ?]

Commentary

With her newly-acquired knowledge of Noísiu's existence, Deirdriu steals out of her enclosure to confront him, but her motives for doing so are unexplored by the text, beyond the fact that she wishes to see for herself what Leborcham has described (an instance of *grád écmaise*, 'love-in-absence', is suggested but not confirmed). Moreover, no narratorial comment is passed upon her actions, beyond the obvious discomfort, on Noísiu's part, which results from her words. The audience is left to speculate whether or not Leborcham has provided further instruction, unattested by the text, concerning the exit from the *les* chosen by Deirdriu or whether, with greater autonomy – or the knowledge that there was something to observe outside – the chosen route might have been utilised before. The comparison made by the girl between Noísiu and Conchobor implies that, whilst her knowledge of Noísiu was imparted at second-hand, she has greater knowledge of Conchobor, similarly unattested, upon which to draw. Despite the potential intimacy implied by her use of the diminutive *tarbín*, it is worth noting that the comparison between the two men does not extend beyond the most basic of epithets, e.g. *tarbín óag* versus *tarb in chóicid*, and is essentially restricted to their social positions rather than to more personal attributes (the physical comparisons are implied by Deirdriu's description of a man whom she might give love to, rather than one whose appearance is presumably known, but has found less favour).

When Noísiu first catches sight of Deirdriu passing by, it is stated that 'he did not recognise her' (l.110; *nis-n-athgéoin*), and his unguarded reaction is the equivalent of a wolf-whistle (*is cain [...] in t-samaisc tête sechunn!*) Initially, from his perspective, she is an innocent, passive, object of desire (cf. 2.3, below). The girl's response to his greeting, however, immediately dispels this complacency, suggesting that, despite the interval between Deirdriu's birth and the time of their encounter, the Ulstermen's collective awareness of her potential to devastate the province has not diminished. Her first words confirm that she, reared in an environment from which 'bulls' were excluded (*dlegtair...samaisci móra bale na-bít tairb*), is the girl of whom Cathbad warned and Conchobor has sought to contain. Noísiu replies that, though bulls may have been scarce, the 'bull of the province' himself holds her in regard (*atá tarb in chóiced lat....i. rí Ulad*), confirming his knowledge of her identity, and he rejects her advances [= *result* I]. It is clear that Noísiu,

⁸⁸ {.....} denotes the embedded scene.

invoking the prophecy made by Cathbad (*cid fo bithin fáitsine Cathbad*) as the reason why he may not respond favourably to Deirdriu's preference for his person over Conchobor's, is aware of its implications for any persons who might associate with her. Noísiu's caution suggests that, although he has already expressed attraction for Deirdriu, he is not prepared, unlike Conchobor, to compromise his integrity or a relationship regulated by prescribed behaviour⁸⁹ in order to act upon it. His restraint and consideration for the potential consequences of that attraction provide a further contrast between the two men.

Although Noísiu's rejection of Deirdriu on these grounds may be seen to attest to the superiority of his character in comparison to Conchobor's, it is not necessarily evidence of his greater fitness to rule Ulster (cf. 1 4.3.1, above). Whilst there is little doubt of Conchobor's neglect of his responsibilities, and probable abuses of *fír* with regard to Deirdriu (as 2.2.1, above), it is less clear how far the theme of good leadership and sovereignty should be seen to inform the background and narrative progress of LMU. The narrator's description of the second *incidence* of the episode, i.e. Deirdriu's refusal to accept that Noísiu will not respond to her overtures except with displeasure, restricts commentary concerning her motives for continuing the pursuit to the statement that, following Noísiu's confirmation of the reasons for his displeasure (*fáitsine Cathbad*), she leaps forward to grasp him by his two ears (*fo-ceird-si bedg cucí corro-gab a dá n-ó fora chinn*), and threatens that they will become *dá n-ó mele ocus cuitbiuda* (see below) unless he takes her away with him from Ulster (l.120). Extensive scholarly discussion concerning the implicit motivation for this act (as 1 4.3.3, above) has suggested – in addition to its interpretation as a merely 'capricious' action upon Deirdriu's part (Gabriel 1995, 61), or as symptomatic of the 'uncivilised' girl's only means of communication, upon animal terms rather than human (e.g. Dooley 156–57) – that its structure confirms the triangular nature of the relationship between the parties involved (e.g. MacCana 1982, 146).

The conversation between Deirdriu and Noísiu provides little support for previous claims of Deirdriu's status as a sovereignty figure, or for her choice of Noísiu over Conchobor (as 1 4.3.1, above).⁹⁰ Despite the fact that, as Tymoczko notes, the description of all three brothers' effect upon the land suggests the *maic Uislenn* to be eminently suitable contenders for its guardianship (1985–6, 155), there is no indication that the means for an exchange of power between Conchobor and any of the brothers are at hand. Nor does an obvious, positive alteration in the brothers' circumstances occur as a result of Noísiu's encounter with the alleged *flaithius*.

89 Noísiu's relationship to Conchobor – client/ warrior to overlord – involves obligations similar to those which ought to exist between an overlord and the land and people of whom he has charge. In Conchobor's case, his adoption of Deirdriu in spite of the devastation it was prophesied that she would wreak upon his kingdom, was made in violation of his duty to Ulster (cf. 2.2.1, above).

90 Raymond Cormier, moreover, incorrectly states that Deirdriu bestows kisses upon Noísiu during their encounter, as symbols of the exchange-of-power between Conchobor and himself (1976, 599).

Furthermore, although the potential elevation in their status is not always apparent to the candidate to whom it is offered (e.g. Niall Nóigíallach, or Mael Fothartaig in *Fingal Rónáin*), Noísiu, as we have seen, exhibits nothing beyond dissatisfaction at Deirdriu's words. No land is transferred to the *maic Uislenn*, their apparent heroism in choosing to protect Noísiu's threatened honour, in spite of the probable consequences, is not celebrated, and the only effect of Deirdriu's interference in the brothers' lives is their immediate demotion from feted members of the *fian* (cf. Buttimer 1994–5, 9, 10–15), to exiles from their native province. Whilst it is true that the epithet bestowed upon Deirdriu at her birth indicates at least one aspect of her function within LMU (as 1 4.3.1, above; cf. Wynn 1990, 129),⁹¹ further evidence for even vestigial sovereignty remains in doubt (at least, within LMU itself: cf. 2.3, below).

Equally doubtful is the nature of the coercion present within the words spoken by Deirdriu to Noísiu, also the subject of considerable debate amongst critics of LMU (as 1 4.3.2, above). The physical threat posed by the girl is restricted to the moment in which she grasps hold of Noísiu's ears, announcing that they will become *dá n-ó méle ocus cuitbiuda*, 'two ears of shame and derision', unless he accedes to her request to be removed from Ulster (ll.119–20).⁹² Whatever the exact nature of the danger posed to Noísiu, it is clear that enormous weight is attached to the consequences of Deirdriu's words achieving fruition, even though no one besides Noísiu is aware that the words have been uttered, and in spite of his emphatic, consistent refusal to entertain her request. From the moment at which she replies to Noísiu's plea that she 'go away from him' (ll.121–22), Deirdriu does not repeat her initial demand, plays no further part in the scene, and utters, in fact, no further speech within the text until she advises the brothers to flee from the king of Scotland's warriors (l.158).⁹³ The words which accompany her grasping of Noísiu's ears are, once uttered, impossible to ignore, and appear to be irrefutable despite the privacy of the situation in which they were spoken. The powerful, albeit ambiguous, effect of Deirdriu's declaration is similar to the effect of Gráinne's words upon Oisín and Diarmaid ó Duibhne within *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*, at a banquet celebrating her betrothal to Oisín's father Fionn mac Cumhaill (Ní Shéaghdha 1967, ll.94–191). The proposal of Fionn as a husband having, apparently, incurred her displeasure, Gráinne seeks another spouse. To assist with her deliberations she administers a sleeping-draught to each guest at the banquet, with the exception of herself, Diarmaid and Oisín. Both men are propositioned with advances which, though not identical to those made by Deirdriu to Noísiu, result in a similarly incontrovertible state of affairs. Turning first to Oisín, Gráinne enquires whether or not he will accept courtship from her,

91 Her former beauty may also decline following the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* (Tymoczko 1985–6, 156–57; cf. 2.2.6, below).

92 For an alternative interpretation of this phrase, see Arbuthnot (forthcoming).

93 It is implied that she speaks to the steward of the king of Scotland, and also relates to Noísiu the nature of their daily conversations (ll.151–58), but these words are unstated within the text.

and is refused on the grounds that her betrothal to his father renders this course of action improper. Turning to Diarmaid, however, the same request that he accept courtship from her is refused, on the grounds that not only is Gráinne betrothed to Fionn, but also to Oisín – in spite of the fact that at no stage within the earlier conversation did Oisín respond favourably to the girl's suggestion. The very fact of its utterance aloud is sufficient to ensure the longevity of the statement, and the subsequent obligations placed upon those persons to whom it is addressed.⁹⁴ Though Noísiu rejects Deirdriu's request to be removed from Ulster absolutely, his refusal does not result in the cancellation of the words themselves, whose mere utterance, like Gráinne's proposition of Oisín, creates a situation as precarious for the person addressed as if an audience of many more besides had also overheard them. Noísiu's abrupt dismissal of Deirdriu does not affect the inevitable outcome of their encounter, a conviction apparent in the terrible cry emitted by Noísiu, the *andord* overheard by the Ulstermen, which results in immediate alarm (ll.123–24; see below).

Sharon Arbuthnot's suggestion (forthcoming), that it is horse's ears rather than more general shame which is threatened upon Noísiu, is consistent with the animal imagery underlying the greater part of his conversation with Deirdriu (as 1 4.4.3, above). It has been suggested that the lack of subtlety displayed by the girl occurs in consequence of a childhood “unschooled in societal norms” (Herbert 1992a, 57), and that her recourse to the language of the farmyard results from unfamiliarity with any more sophisticated speech (cf. Dooley 1982, 156–57). Herbert also suggests that Noísiu is entirely unprepared for language of this kind, which falls “completely outside of learned cultural convention” (1992a, 57–58). Far from following in the wake of Deirdriu's 'uncivilised' lead, however, it is Noísiu who speaks first during their conversation, and Noísiu's words – declaring the beauty of the 'heifer' (*samaisc*) which has passed him (l.111) – which introduce the terminology of the farmyard to their dialogue. Whilst it is true that Deirdriu's upbringing has exposed her to the language of the pasture and farmyard far more than to that of the rest of Ulster's population, it is possible that Noísiu's initial response to her presence suggests to the girl that this is the manner in which humans also converse.⁹⁵ Despite the undeniably aggressive nature of her subsequent threat, Deirdriu's use of a form of speech, which has been referred to either as representative of her intrinsically savage nature, or of her choice of 'nature' (i.e. mating), over the civilised culture of possession and obligated exchange (Dooley 1982, 156),

94 Diarmaid is also placed under several *geasa* by Gráinne (Ní Shéaghdha 1967, ll.162–67), but his initial objection is to the fact of her existing 'betrothal' to Oisín, as well as to his father (*ór gídh bé bean do luaithidhe re hOisín ní cubhaidh ream-sa bheith ria dá mbeith nach luaithfidhe re Fionn hÍ*).

95 In spite of her biological father's profession (*scélaige*), it would appear that Deirdriu, reared apart from the atmosphere she would otherwise – barring death at the Ulstermen's hands – have absorbed, is a child of nurture rather than nature. Furthermore, instead of being exposed during childhood to the more benign role of the court poet, offering occasional censure, but primarily committed to the praise of his lord, the girl's only familiarity with words and language outwith the environment of the *les* is as the weapon wielded, even *in potentia*, by Leborcham's satires and threats thereof (contra Stelmach 2007, 145).

may also be seen, with far less ambiguity, as being conditioned by her reaction to Noísiu's lead (an interpretation consistent with the general passivity of Deirdriu's character throughout LMU; cf. 2.3, below).

The *andord* which issues from Noísiu, upon realising the extent of his predicament, attracts the attention of his brothers, who assume that an error of Noísiu's own is responsible for his distress, and chastise him for alarming the Ulstermen into taking up their weapons (ll.126–27; '*na imma-ngonad d'Ulaib it chinaid!*'). Cornelius Buttimer contrasts the *andord* emitted here with the *dord*, or 'tenor' voices attributed to the brothers during the earlier description of their advantageous effects upon Ulster (cf. 2.2.2, above). This is notable, in light of the fact that Vernam Hull's translation of these terms makes no distinction between the positive *dord*, and what Buttimer (1994–5, 11–12) deduces to be the “negative sense” of the sound, with its prefix *an-* (cf. Hull 1949, 63). A further parallel between the action of this episode and the action of an earlier scene occurs when Noísiu relates to his brothers 'what had been done to him' (l. 127; *a ndo-rónad friss*). Their response, that 'there will be evil [resulting] from it', i.e. from his encounter with Deirdriu (l.128; *biaid olc de*), mirrors Cathbad's use of a similar phrase (ll.53–54; *biaid olc impe*) referring to the newborn child's future effect upon Ulster, should she be allowed to survive – Cathbad's prediction describing the potential harm to the province that Deirdriu's encounter with Noísiu begins to fulfil.

Once the other *maic Uislenn* have been apprised of the situation (ll.128–30), they declare that, in spite of the probable consequences, Noísiu's honour and reputation must be protected (*noco-bia-so fo mebail céin bemmit-ni i mbethaid*). It is, in effect, a choice made by Ainnle and Ardán, rather than Noísiu, which results in the decision to leave Ulster and to take Deirdriu with them as she has requested, contrary to Máire Herbert's assertion that Noísiu's response to Deirdriu's words and actions is “swift and unmeditated” (1992a, 58). Her statement overlooks the interlude between the time of Noísiu's conversation with Deirdriu, and their eventual departure from Ulster – during which Noísiu discusses the implications of her proposition with his concerned brothers – as well as the fact that it is the decision of the other two *maic Uislenn*, rather than Noísiu's own, to undertake the course of action subsequently pursued [= *result* III; *setting* IV]. During this episode in particular, the role of Ainnle and Ardán is seen to be of greater importance than is generally acknowledged, especially by Martin's compression of their respective contributions to the narrative into the same classification as Noísiu's (e.g. 1975–6, 144; cf. Vitz 1989, 157ff.). The decision to leave Ulster also emphasises the severity of the situation into which Noísiu has been placed. The reaction of Ainnle and Ardán suggests that it would be impossible for Noísiu to remain in the province following Deirdriu's overture, and her expression of preference for the inferior warrior over Conchobor, her nominal guardian and Noísiu's overlord. Nor is it possible,

according to the reaction of Ainnle and Ardán, for Deirdriu to be left behind should the *maic Uislenn* themselves abscond. In spite of the disgrace (*mebail*) that his brothers predict for Noísiu, a quality innate to his other brothers – whether honour, valour, or the necessity required by narrative progress – decrees that Deirdriu must also be preserved from the consequences of her misdemeanour. No other option is considered beyond immediate departure (ll.128–31), and Deirdriu herself is excluded from further discussion of the matter once her initial, and only, autonomous demand has been made. There is no indication that she plays any further part in the process of deciding how best to expiate the consequences of that demand, a passivity continued during the exiled party's sojourn outside Ulster (cf. 2.3, below).

Conchobor's response to Deirdriu's behaviour, and her departure alongside the *maic Uislenn*, is not recorded, aside from the statement (l.135) that it is with 'snares and guiles' (*indlega ocus chelga*) that the exiles' subsequent pursuit throughout Ireland is arranged. Contrary to assumptions of Deirdriu's achievement of sexual contentment with Noísiu, at Conchobor's expense (e.g. Martin 1975–6, 143), the status of the couple's relationship following their first encounter is unexplored by the text, and its exact nature receives little clarification, unlike the overt reference within *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* to Gráinne's taunting of Diarmaid that a drop of water which splashes against her leg is bolder than he has been thus far (Ní Shéaghdha 1967, ll.781–89; *A Dhiarmaid [ar sí] giodh mór do chródhacht 7 do chalmacht a ccomhlannaibh 7 a ccath-láithribh dar liom féin as dána an braon beag baoth-uisge úd ioná tú*).⁹⁶ Nor can the departure of Deirdriu and Noísiu from Ulster be described, accurately, as an elopement, when, in spite of her initial request to be removed from the province, the ultimate decision to leave it is made by Ainnle and Ardán, instead of by either of the parties alleged to have 'eloped' (contra, e.g. Cormier 1976–8, 600). The intimacy implied by the term 'elopement' is also belied by the actual size of the departing group, comprised not only of Noísiu and Deirdriu, but of the 150 other 'warriors, women, servants and animals', amongst whom the girl's presence is concealed. The exiles' pursuit throughout Ireland by Conchobor culminates in their departure for Scotland, where, without support similar to that provided by the various lords through whose territory they passed beforehand, the *maic Uislenn* and their company must attempt to maintain themselves by reliance upon the land alone, whose inhospitality is such, in fact, that it is said to resemble *dithreb*, a 'desert', 'wilderness' or 'uninhabited place' (DIL 218, 149, 5ff = *incipit* of following episode).

2.2.4: Service with the king of Scotland; the decision to return [SII, EI i; ii; iii; iv (embedded); ll.138–70]

Sequence 2 (embedded): -

⁹⁶ In the following episode [l.152], Noísiu is referred to as the 'consort' (*céli*) of Deirdriu; cf. 2.2.4, below.

6. + ZC. “Noise (together with his brothers) shows himself heroic (C) by maintaining himself in the wilderness and reiving the Scots' cattle” (1975–76, 143).
7. + (XB) opt. W. “The king of Scotland [W] wishes to make Deirdriu his concubine” (id., 143).
8. → ZC! “Noise shows himself more heroic in frustrating the plots laid against him” (id., 143).
9. + Za. “Noise modifies the situation [a] by removing Deirdriu from Scotland and taking her to an island” (id., 143).

Martin classifies the action of this episode as 'embedded', taking place at the same time as debate concerning the exile of the *maic Uislenn*, and the cause of their departure, occurs in Ulster. The burden of action throughout the scene is attributed by Martin to Noísiu, rather than to Deirdriu, despite the fact that her series of encounters with the steward [S], the king of Scotland's representative, take place in advance of Noísiu's awareness of the king's intentions, and prior to the time of his own response. The role played within this episode by characters other than the *maic Uislenn* is once again reduced in significance, as are the reasons underlying the brothers' fear that Deirdriu's presence, if discovered by the king's warriors, will lead to bloodshed (see below).

As a result of Conchobor's pursuit, the *maic Uislenn* [Z Ai. Ar.], Deirdriu [X], and the exiled company [Ex.] are driven to settle in Scotland, despite the inhospitable nature of its landscape [= *incipit*, i.e. the ultimate *result* of the series of *incidences* within the previous episode]. The barren terrain [= *setting* I] results in food-shortages, failure of the mountain game, and the eventual theft of cattle by Noísiu and his brothers (Z Ai. Ar. b = *incidence* I), pursued, in consequence, as far as the court of the king of Scotland by outraged local warriors [Ws -A] seeking retribution for their loss [= *result* I]. Frustrating the warriors' intentions to harm the exiles, the *maic Uislenn* take service with the king [W a = *setting* II], and are absorbed into his household, placing their dwellings in his demesne (MS *faithchi*).⁹⁷ Deirdriu, whose presence the *maic Uislenn* fear will provoke danger if discovered by the king's company (ll.142–43), is concealed amongst the rest of the exiles, although the precise cause of the brothers' anxiety, and the nature of their fear, is unexplored by the text (see below). In spite of their precautions, she is observed by the king's steward [S a = *incidence* II], who informs the king that Deirdriu is 'the one woman in the world' most suited to a man of his rank (= *result* II ['the king learns of Deirdriu's existence'], *setting* III). Although the king refuses to entertain the steward's initial suggestion that Noísiu should be killed, in order to facilitate their union, he instructs him to woo Deirdriu upon his behalf by proxy [*incidence* III], a proceeding she reports upon to Noísiu every night following the steward's departure, whilst the *maic Uislenn* are dispatched upon a series of dangerous missions in the hope that they will not return. Their collective prowess and skill in battle, however, frustrate the

⁹⁷ DIL F 293, 33.

intentions of the king and his steward [Z Ai. Ar. C], until an overt attempt to procure their deaths is decided upon, shared with Deirdriu, and related by her [X a] to the *maic Uislenn*, who depart Scotland in consequence for an ‘island of the sea’ (*inis mara* = *result* III, *setting* IV). Word of their relocation reaches the Ulstermen [*incidence* IV, embedded], who complain to Conchobor about the damage done to the *maic Uislenn* ‘though the crime of a bad woman’ (*tre chin droch-mná*; see below), and suggest that a return to Ulster free of repercussions might be permitted them [U a]. The *maic Uislenn* request sureties for their return in the forms of Fergus, Dubthach and Conchobor’s son Cormac, who depart for the sea to escort the exiles back to Emain [= *result* IV/ *incipit* of following episode].

(X Z Ai. Ar. Ex. –A)

Z Ai. Ar. b (Ws –A)

→ W a // S a

= W S b // Z Ai. Ar. C

→ W b // X a // Z Ai. Ar. a {U a // Ex. A}⁹⁸

Commentary

With the departure of the *maic Uislenn* and their company from Ulster, the action of LMU shifts from Conchobor’s domain to the territories of *rí Alban*, the king of Scotland [W], who is otherwise unnamed and poorly contextualised (cf. 2.3, below).⁹⁹ Whilst his anonymity contrasts with the familiar presence of Conchobor at Emain, in several other respects the king of Scotland and the series of events enacted within his kingdom reflect, in reverse, the relationship of the *maic Uislenn* with Deirdriu and Conchobor, prior to their departure from Ulster. In the episodes prior to the exile, Conchobor exhibits an inappropriate desire for Deirdriu, leading to her seclusion from ordinary society, ‘in order that no one might see her’ (ll.86–87) until such time as Conchobor may consummate the union. After the intervention of an interested third party, her meeting with Noísiu and his brothers, persons whose involvement with the girl contravenes the authority of her current guardian, also results. The complex nuances of Deirdriu’s conversation with Noísiu, and its circumspect sexual nature, result in the brothers’ departure from the native land in which they have formerly enjoyed high renown. In the second half of the text, following the company’s departure from Ulster and arrival in Scotland, the characters’ previous roles – e.g. Deirdriu’s *Subjet*, Noísiu’s *Objet* and Leborcham’s *Adjutant*, as in 2.2.3, above – are re-embodied, but with the identities of the actants in play, with some exceptions, reassigned. In other words, the function of the characters depicted within each successive episode following the

⁹⁸ {.....} denotes the embedded scene.

⁹⁹ It is almost certainly significant that no place names are provided in the course of the company’s movements around the country, or even the location of the king’s court; cf. 1 3.1, above, and 2.3, below; cf. Bevan 1957.

exiled company's departure from Ulster – which event, in itself, may be seen as the vanishing point of LMU, towards and away from which each scene thus progresses – reflects, in reverse, the functions of the characters and their roles within the respective *incidences*, *settings* and *results* of the episodes culminating in the brothers' departure. The embedded episodes of LMU, i.e. the period in exile from Ulster, form a mirror image of the events and interactions prior to that occurrence.

Once in Scotland, exiles instead of fated warriors, and in contrast to the occasion upon which the captive Deirdriu, her language laden with farmyard imagery, bestows herself upon them, the *maic Uislenn* are forced by hunger (i.e. a *manque*, or lack) to take possession of cattle belonging, rightfully, to local warriors (and, by extension, to their king).¹⁰⁰ Unlike the manner in which their company was driven from Ulster, the *maic Uislenn* are welcomed at the king of Scotland's court, following his forgiveness of their reiving (the reverse of 'the brothers offend the king [Conchobor] by contravening his authority over Deirdriu', and their departure from Ulster in consequence), whilst Deirdriu, whose immense beauty and untutored desires met with only anxiety and repression in Emain, is solicited upon the king of Scotland's behalf by reason of that same beauty's suitability to the promotion of his status. This solicitation occurs during a period of further seclusion for the girl, securing her, as the *maic Uislenn* hope, from inspiring further strife (II.142–43; see below), but this concealment, contrary to her enclosure during childhood, results from a state of affairs to whose inception, far from granting mere consent, she was actively complicit. The king of Scotland's knowledge of her presence nearby is brought to his attention, just as Leborcham brought news of Noísiu's proximity, by the intervention of a third party in the person of the steward, who has caught sight of the girl in spite of her isolation and reveals her whereabouts to the king ('*atá i fail Noísen maic Uislenn ben dingbála rí ġarthair domuin*'). His emphasis upon her suitability in this manner resembles Leborcham's earlier implication that Noísiu's own credentials denote greater suitability than Conchobor's as a partner for Deirdriu, although the king of Scotland's apparent wish to entreat the girl to accept his suit, prior to implementing a liaison by force, is directly at odds with Conchobor's appropriation of a child too young to object. Whilst relations between Deirdriu and her male associates, Noísiu and the king of Scotland, are both orchestrated by a go-between, each of whom (i.e. Leborcham and the king of Scotland's steward) attempt to influence the course of action undertaken as a result of their interference, there is variation between the respective subjects' responses to the information they receive. Whereas, upon Leborcham's revelation of Noísiu's proximity ('*ni cían úait*'), and correspondence to the detail of her vision, Deirdriu announces her immediate intention to seek

100 Whilst this is not directly stated by the text, weight is lent to the suggestion by the fact that the king, against the protests of his warriors, is able to exonerate the brothers from the consequences of their reiving, a decision which may indicate closer involvement with the issue at hand than a monarch's ordinary powers of judicial review. Deirdriu, in contrast to the disputed cattle, was not rightfully possessed by Conchobor (as 2.1.1, above).

him out (ll.97–99), the king of Scotland initially rejects the steward’s suggestion that Noísiu should be killed at once in order for Deirdriu to sleep with him (ll.147–49).¹⁰¹ The subsequent dangers faced by the *maic Uislenn* at the king’s instigation, when their deaths would allow him to secure Deirdriu for his own purposes unopposed, contrast to Conchobor’s initial annexation of the newborn Deirdriu’s future, when only his intervention against his warriors’ wish to have her killed allows that she may achieve her prophesied state of beauty at his convenience. The Ulstermen who called for the child’s death are the same who now request that a pardon be granted to the *maic Uislenn*, facilitating their removal from a situation in which their own lives are currently under threat.

In short, the series of events leading to the exile of the *maic Uislenn* from Ulster, and the embedded episode which follows, involve two kings, two intermediaries, and two supporting casts of local warriors (the Ulstermen at Conchobor’s court, and the dependants of the king of Scotland, probably to be equated with those whose cattle are stolen by the *maic Uislenn* following their arrival). The roles enacted by Deirdriu and Noísiu are, in the strictest sense, interchangeable, given that by the close of the embedded episode, when the *maic Uislenn* have been granted permission to return to Ulster, the position of the characters is similar to their respective statuses at the time of each one’s first appearance upon the ‘stage’ of the text (although it should be noted that the statuses of Deirdriu and Noísiu, as they perceive them to be, differ from the actual circumstances surrounding their return).¹⁰² Deirdriu, as a newborn infant, though unaware of the fact at the time, was prophesied to bring untold death and destruction upon the Ulstermen should she survive, a prediction whose fulfilment, temporarily interrupted by her absence from Ireland, resumes, even as she is returned against her will to Conchobor’s custody (cf. 2.2.5, below). The *maic Uislenn*, meanwhile, unaware of the imminent defection of their principal guarantor, as well as of the involvement of Eogan mac Durthacht, believe themselves to be on the verge of restoration to their former positions within the hierarchy of the Ulster court.¹⁰³ The parallelism of events occurring within the embedded episode, with the series of events culminating in the company’s departure from Ireland, suggests that emphasis has been placed by the author of LMU upon the paramount importance of the departure to, and within the overall structure of, the text (cf. 2.4, below).

The seclusion in which Deirdriu is maintained by the *maic Uislenn*, following their arrival in Scotland, receives no further narratorial comment, beyond the fact that the brothers, by restricting

101 It is possible that the king’s initial refusal to abduct Deirdriu by force is intended to provide a further contrast between his overall conduct towards the girl, and Conchobor’s.

102 What Martin calls the ‘fausse vision’ of their situations, as controlled by Conchobor (1975–76, 143).

103 Their insistence upon guarantors prior to agreeing to return does not necessarily suggest that imminent foul play is suspected.

the number of persons aware of her presence (ll.142–43), hope that ‘they might not be killed with respect to her’ (*naro-marbtais impe*). Their anxiety is likely to have arisen in consequence of the manner in which their own responsibility for Deirdriu was implemented, i.e. the occasion upon which she absconded from her former enclosure within Conchobor’s custody, and engaged Noísiu in the conversation leading, ultimately, to the brothers’ need to remove her, and themselves, from Ulster. Whilst it is possible that the precedent set by this encounter has resulted in the concern that Deirdriu’s own behaviour upon that occasion will be repeated, given the wide range of reversed parallels found throughout the rest of the Scottish (i.e. embedded) episode, it is more likely that Deirdriu’s propositioning by the king of Scotland and his steward should be read as the textual embodiment of the brothers’ unspecified fear (i.e. ‘Deirdriu is solicited by another man’, in contrast to ‘Deirdriu solicits Noísiu’ during the period of her earlier captivity).¹⁰⁴

Deirdriu’s solicitation by the king of Scotland – or, more specifically, by his steward upon the king’s behalf – and the relationship between the girl and the steward during the period of his mediation, reflects the circumspect sexual nature of her earlier dialogue with Noísiu (as 2.2.3, above). Whilst the instruction of the text itself is restricted to the king’s command that his steward ‘go every day to beseech [Deirdriu] in secret for me’ (*‘eirg-siu dia guidi dam-sa cech láa fo chlith’*), the terminology employed, and the use of an intermediary in this context, bears a suggestive resemblance to a relationship of the sort depicted, for example, within *Fingal Rónáin*, between a subject, the current object of their desire, and a messenger employed to relay word of that subject’s affections to the object. During the course of *Fingal Rónáin*, a woman known only as ‘Echaid’s daughter’ pursues the king of Leinster’s son, Mael Fothartaig, despite the fact that she is married to his father, Rónán. In the first of several attempts to arrange a tryst between herself and Mael Fothartaig, she instructs her *inailt* (usually ‘foster-sister’ or ‘handmaid’; cf. Ní Dhonnchadha 1986) to solicit him upon her behalf, a process resulting in a temporary sexual union between Mael Fothartaig and Echaid’s daughter’s messenger, later referred to by the girl’s mistress as an integral part of her attempt at mediation (Greene 1955, ll.27ff.). The *inailt*, initially too nervous to mention the reason for her errand to Mael Fothartaig himself, tells his foster-brother Congal of her mistress’s intentions. Having informed the girl of the ensuing threat to her life, should the true cause of her mission be revealed, Congal arranges for the *inailt* to sleep with Mael Fothartaig instead, apparently satisfied that a potentially dangerous situation has thus been averted (id., ll.38–40). Echaid’s daughter’s response to the news, however, is quite different (id., ll.42–43): ‘I am well pleased’, she says, ‘for you will dare to deliver the message if you lie with

104 For an alternative interpretation of the following scene see Buttimer 1994–5, 17–21. I do not concur with Buttimer’s suggestion that, as a person “concealed, housed apart and subjected to repeated testing” (id., 20), Deirdriu automatically assumes the role of typological figurehead to the rest of the exiled group, when each of these elements may be more accurately explained in relation to the series of similar events culminating in the party’s recent exile from Ireland.

him yourself, and you shall deal with him on my behalf after' (*'Is maith lem [...] ar roléma-su a rád ind athisc acht cocomris féin fris, ocus déna mo les-sa iarum friss'*). The following lines of the text, in a phrase closely resembling the resolution to the king of Scotland's instruction that his steward solicit Deirdriu upon his behalf (LMU 1.150), states that '[this] is done. The young woman [*inailt*] sleeps with him, that is, with Mael Fothartaig' (*'do-gníther. Foid ind ócben leis .i. la Mael Fothartaig'*).¹⁰⁵ In LMU, once the king of Scotland has been told by his steward of the presence of Deirdriu within his kingdom, and of her suitability to enhance the status of a man of his rank, he sends the steward to woo the girl upon his behalf, rather than propositioning her in person (the secrecy of the endeavour [*'fo chliith'*] is also reminiscent of the covert state of affairs within *Fingal Rónáin*, when Echaid's daughter cannot be less than cautious in the pursuit of her goal). Whilst the text of LMU states only that the steward and Deirdriu engage in a series of conversations, which are related each night to Noísiu following the steward's departure (ll.151–52), the similarity of the triangular association between the king, the girl and the steward (i.e. subject, object, intermediary), to that of Echaid's daughter, Mael Fothartaig and the unnamed young woman who solicits him by proxy for her mistress, allows at least the possibility that the steward's pursuit of Deirdriu upon the king's behalf exceeds the theoretical. In this light, the following statement (ll.152–53) that 'one never could attain anything from her' (*úair naro-étad ní dí*), strengthens the suggestion that it is not merely the steward's verbal entreaties with which Deirdriu must contend.

It is Deirdriu's sustained refusal to respond to the steward's advances, whatever their form, which precipitates an increase of severity in the king of Scotland's attitude towards the *maic Uislenn*. The brothers' prowess has so far ensured that their deaths, desired by the king and his steward, have not resulted from any of the dangerous encounters upon which they have been sent. Accordingly, it is stated that (l.156), 'the men of Scotland were assembled to kill them', i.e. the *maic Uislenn* (*ro-tinólta fir Alban dia marbad*). The warriors' intention, in itself unsurprising, appears to have been determined with Deirdriu's connivance: their plan to kill the brothers was formed, the text states (l.156), following 'consultation with her regarding it' (*íarna chomairli frie-si*). Vernam Hull's translation of *comairle* was clearly his preferred option (cf. DIL C 134, 341–42), and whilst 'consultation' strikes a less judgemental note than, for example, 'advice', 'resolution' or 'conspiracy', also within the semantic range of the verbal noun, the narrator of LMU clearly testifies to Deirdriu's involvement in, and apparent collusion with, the king of Scotland's plan to cause harm to Noísiu and his brothers. The statement appears to represent a

105 For *foaid* (vn. *fess*) see DIL F 312, 179. The fact that Mael Fothartaig attempts to remove himself from his uncomfortable proximity to Echaid's daughter by crossing the sea to Scotland, and entering the service of its king (Greene 1955 ll.55–61), may have brought other similarities between the relationships of Mael Fothartaig with the two women, and that of Deirdriu with the steward and *rí Alban*, to the mind of the text's narrator (the earliest extant copy of *Fingal Rónáin* also occurs in LL, at folios 271–73).

further instance of the reflected events found throughout the rest of the embedded episode. Pre-exile, Conchobor's intervention on behalf of the newborn Deirdriu saves the girl he desires – though without her consent – from being destroyed by his warriors, whilst the adult Deirdriu's connivance with the warriors of Scotland would result in the death of Noísiu, the man chosen as her subsequent guardian. It is also possible, alternatively, that Deirdriu's complicity in the king of Scotland's plans is intended to convey her relative indifference to Noísiu, to the extent that she is prepared to collude with plans for his death, and to underline the relative absence of sexual interest displayed throughout the course of LMU by either party for each other, despite the propensity of later commentators to describe the relationship of Deirdriu and Noísiu as a celebrated tragic romance (as 1 1.6, above; cf. Tymoczko 1985–6).

It is undeniable, however, that regardless of the extent of her complicity with the men of Scotland's plan, word of their intentions is related to Noísiu by Deirdriu herself (l.157), and it is upon her suggestion that the company, to remove themselves from danger, depart at once for the unnamed island (ll.158–60). Whilst the apparent inconsistency between Deirdriu's ultimate revelation of the king's plan, and her earlier involvement with its formulation, may initially suggest some confusion on the part of the tale's compiler, given the textual sophistication manifest throughout the rest of LMU this seems unlikely. Alternatively, Deirdriu's endurance, and possible encouragement, of advances made by the steward upon the king's behalf, perhaps with the intention of maintaining a position in which she will learn of potential dangers to the exiled company in sufficient time to avert them, may depict a level of intelligence on Deirdriu's part not usually noticed by critics of the text (cf. Herbert 1992, 58, who notes that the messages relayed to Noísiu constitute a growth in Deirdriu's "awareness" of the world around her, resulting from "information [received] rather than instinct"). This interpretation of her behaviour, if accepted, would be contrasted immediately afterwards by the Ulstermen's complaint (ll.62–63) that the *maic Uislenn* have been driven to reside in hostile lands only by the actions of a 'bad woman' (*droch-mná*).

Conchobor's initial acquiescence to the Ulstermen's pleas for a pardon to be granted to the *maic Uislenn*, results in the exiled company's return to Ireland (= *incipit* of following episode).

2.2.5: Return; betrayal; death [SI (resumed) EIV i, ii, iii; ll.171–90]

Sequence I (resumed): -

10. + XZ (YcXZ) -opt. Y. "Noise and Deirdriu are deceived into thinking that Conchobor no longer wishes to punish them; i.e. they have a 'fausse vision' of the situation..."

11. → YcXZ // X -A // Yb. "Conchobor has Noise killed and makes Deirdriu his prisoner (Yc). Deirdriu is full of sorrow, as foretold (X -A). But in punishing the elopers Conchobor acts

treacherously and offends against the code of honourable conduct (Yb) [Martin 1975–76, 143].

This episode marks the return of the *maic Uislenn*, Deirdriu and the exiled company to Ulster, and the re-commencement of Sequence I. Martin classifies only two strands of action, and downplays, once again, the role within the episode played by characters other than Conchobor and the *maic Uislenn*. His reference to Deirdriu's sorrow upon the brothers' deaths, however, acknowledges the retrospective fulfilment of Cathbad's prophecy, apparent throughout much of the scene.

Upon the strength of Conchobor's assurance of their safety, and his agreement to appoint guarantors [= *incipit*], the *maic Uislenn* and their company return to Ireland and proceed towards Emain [= *setting* I]. At some stage during the journey, the brothers vow not to partake of any food until they have reached Conchobor's court, a fact exploited by Conchobor through his covert arrangements to remove Fergus' protection from their company [Y b = *incidence* I; see below]. The entire group of exiles, including all three brothers in addition to Deirdriu (contra Martin), are deceived by this act, and Fergus' position as guarantor is challenged, during the period of his agreement to protect the *maic Uislenn*, by the offer of a feast, which he is apparently unable to decline [F –A = *result* I/ *setting* II; see below]. Fergus and Dubthach separate from the company [= *incidence* II], and the *maic Uislenn* arrive at Emain accompanied only by Fergus' son Fiacha [= *result* II/ *setting* III]. Eogan mac Durthacht, a former opponent of Conchobor, also arrives at court, in order to make peace, and is charged with procuring the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* [Y a = *incidence* III]. The brothers are met by a company of warriors, as the women of the court watch from its walls. Fiacha advances alongside Noísiu as the men are met by Eogan mac Durthacht, and casts himself between Noísiu and Eogan's spear at the same time as it is thrust, resulting in both their deaths [E a// Fi. C// Z –A]. Ainnle and Ardán are also 'killed throughout the green' (*ro-marbtha [...] sethnón na faithche*), and Deirdriu is led back to Conchobor with her hands bound [= *result* III/ *incipit* of following episode].

(Y a) Y b

→ F –A + Y a

= E a// Fi. C// Z –A

Commentary

The prophecy made by Cathbad upon the occasion of Deirdriu's birth (as above, 2.2.1) achieves partial fulfilment during this episode, with the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* and of Fergus' son (cf. LMU II.38–39, 'for [Deirdriu] there will be many slaughters amongst the chariot-fighters of Ulster'). It is, however, notable that this prediction, akin to several others achieving apparent

fruition within this scene and the next, are non-specific in nature, and, with the exception of Deirdriu herself, omit mention of named individuals (cf. 2.2.6, below). The deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, and the resumption of Deirdriu's possession by Conchobor, both result directly from his sustained pursuit of the exiles, following their departure from Ulster. With regard to this campaign, Máire Herbert (1992a, 58) has noted that:

“we may interpret Conchobor's pursuit [of the brothers] as being motivated less by jealous lust than by the need to [...] bring unpredictable existence back within confinement. Though finally, in response to the wishes of his warriors, he feigns forgiveness, his design, nevertheless, does not allow acceptance of Deirdre's alienation to Naoise. Moreover, having declared this design [to pardon the exiles?] in a public assembly, acceptance of its reversal would have meant, for the king, public diminishment of his power. Having taken the first injudicious decision with regard to Deirdre, all the king's subsequent breaches of the principles of justice and truth seem to follow inevitably.”

Herbert appears to suggest that, once Conchobor's undertaking to pardon the *maic Uislenn* has been publicly expressed, there is no honourable means to renege upon his word, regardless of the extent of its initial sincerity, and regardless of whether or not his behaviour towards Deirdriu and her escorts has been conducted with honour prior to this point. Conchobor's arrangements for the exiled party's arrival at Emain are designed, ironically, to conceal the betrayal of his own obligations behind others' careful maintenance of theirs. In other words, Fergus' acceptance of the feast to which Conchobor has contrived to have him invited, and his subsequent absence from Emain when the *maic Uislenn* arrive, is dependent upon the brothers' own reluctance to break their commitment to abstain from consuming any food in Ireland before they have accepted Conchobor's (ll.171–73). This declaration, of which Conchobor has clearly been made aware, presumably occurs upon the initial arrival of the exiled party, as a gesture of trust towards the man with whom the *maic Uislenn* hope to be reconciled.

The transparency with which Conchobor's arrangements to divert the exiles' guarantors are depicted by the author of LMU also minimises the extent to which the guarantors themselves can be blamed for failing to maintain their charges' safety. Dubthach's accompaniment of Fergus to the proffered feast is noted only as an aside (ll.174–75), whilst Cormac mac Conchobuir, although initially requested as a guarantor (l.169), is absent from the text during this episode, a fact which, were it not for his support of Fergus and Dubthach in avenging the brothers' deaths (cf. 2.2.6, below), might have denoted complicity with his father's plans.¹⁰⁶ In the case of Fergus mac Róich, traditionally in receipt of the bulk of blame for the exiles' deaths, in direct consequence of his failure to protect them (e.g. Mulchrone 1949, 91), there is also little indication that his decision to attend the feast arranged by Conchobor was a matter for serious debate – the

¹⁰⁶ Buttmer also points out that Cormac's epithet, *Cond Longas*, suggests that he remained a relatively minor figure within the Ulster Cycle, until his part in the destruction of Emain necessitated removal to Connacht alongside the other exiles (1994–5, 24).

son, instead, is substituted for the father, and the travellers continue to Emain (ll.174–75). The text of LMU itself, however, does not specifically state that it was *geis* to Fergus to refuse any feast offered to him, a device which would have allowed greater extenuation for the desertion of the *maic Uislenn* had it been inserted, although it is possible that Conchobor's covert arrangements to divert Fergus' guarantorship take unspoken advantage of a fact too widely known at the time of composition to require further recapitulation. Fergus' own outrage at Conchobor's treatment of the *maic Uislenn* – as well as, perhaps, of himself – is represented within the unit of LMU by the description of his behaviour during the following episode (2.2.6, below).

The role played by Eogan mac Durthacht during this episode is supported by the long-standing feud with Conchobor described in the *macgnímrada* section of *Táin Bó Cuailnge* ('Cath Eógain meic Durthacht fri Conchobor inso'; O'Rahilly 1976, ll.481–523), and also by the assertion within *Fled Bricrenn* that he is Conchobor's brother-in-law, both their wives being daughters of Eochu Feidlech (Buttimer 1994–5, 25). Cornelius Buttimer's analysis of Eogan's apparent wish to be reconciled with Conchobor notes the regularity with which erring warriors may be brought to terms with persons they have previously offended, and the various ways for atonement to be achieved (id., 24–26). In many such examples, the penitent's death occurs during the course of his chosen, reconciliatory activity, and Eogan's survival, despite of his slaughter of Noísiu and Fiacha,¹⁰⁷ may be considered surprising (cf. 2.2.6, below).

Despite the efficient slaughter of the *maic Uislenn*, Deirdriu is returned to Conchobor's custody rather than sharing their fate, a fact supporting Máire Herbert's assertion that it is a restoration of their former status quo which Conchobor's pursuit of the brothers was intended to achieve, as opposed – or in addition – to an act of basic revenge for their defiance of his authority (1992a, 58; as above). It is worth noting, however, that the relative lack of consequences experienced by Conchobor, in light of decisions made throughout the text, does not necessarily connote exoneration for his behaviour towards the *maic Uislenn* and Deirdriu (cf. 2.4, below).

2.2.6: Return of Fergus; assault on Emain [SI EV i, ii, iii; ll.191–203]

Martin's structural analysis of LMU omits mention of the action of the text between the time of Deirdriu's return to Conchobor's custody, and the time of her death. The contribution of Fergus mac Róich to the subsequent progression of the narrative is unexplored, despite the importance of this episode for more general analyses of the sources for, and probable compilation process of, LMU as a structured whole (considered at 4 1.4.1, below).

¹⁰⁷ It is not made explicit within the text of LMU that Eogan is also directly responsible for the deaths of Ainnle and Ardán, though it is a plausible inference to make (LMU ll.184–88).

Following the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, and Conchobor's negation of arrangements for their safety [= *incipit*], Fergus, Dubthach and Cormac mac Conchobuir learn what has occurred [= *setting* I], and return to Emain [= *incidence* I], where they perform 'great deeds' [*gníma móra*]. Dubthach kills Mane, another son of Conchobor's, as well as his daughter's son Fiachna, whilst Fergus kills two warriors, both sons of Traiglethan [D a// F a = *result* I]. As a result of these acts, 'Conchobor's honour was outraged' [*sárugud Conchobuir impu*; Y -A = *setting* II], and battle is joined between his forces and those of Fergus [= *incidence* II], in which 300 Ulstermen are slain. Upon the following day, the women of the court are put to death, and the fortress of Emain is burned [= *result* II/ *setting* III]. The warriors who took part in the assault seek refuge with Ailill and Medb [Ex. a = *incidence* III], and are exiled from Ulster for a period of 16 years, in great distress [Ex. -A = *result* III].

(Z -A) D a// F a
 = Y -A
 → Ex. a// Ex. -A

Commentary

This is the only scene within LMU in which the final action described, i.e. the exile from Ulster of warriors involved in the assault upon Emain, does not also constitute the *incipit* of the following episode. Whilst suspicions of interpolation, upon grounds of content, have been raised by Herbert (1992a, 60), and Ó Háinle (2008, 450–51), little consideration has been given thus far to any additional features of the text which may also denote a difference in cohesion between this episode and others within LMU. Given the tightly-focused nature and strict chronology of scenes 2.2.1–2.2.6, in which the concluding action of each episode also forms the basis of each subsequent action performed during the following episode(s), there is additional reason to suspect the insertion of external material at this stage of the text, especially as the *incipit* of the text's final episode [2.2.7] corresponds to the concluding *result* of episode 2.2.5, rather than to the final action of the scene described below [2.2.6]. The reasons for this insertion are less clear, although it is likely that the additional material's predominant focus upon deeds performed by Fergus mac Róich, may be responsible for the discrepancy, as noted by Herbert and Ó Háinle, between the prophecy made by Cathbad within the opening episode and the predictions within it that are actually fulfilled.

The *incipit* of this episode follows loosely from the result of the preceding scene, i.e. from the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, although we are not informed of the means by which Fergus and his fellow guarantors learned of the brothers' demise or of their location at the time. Regarding the

contents of the episode, Ó Háinle (2008, 450–51), following Hull and Thurneysen (Hull 1949, 29–30), also notes the discrepancy between the named warriors whom Cathbad predicts will meet their deaths in recompense for the demise of the *maic Uislenn* (LMU § 5), and those warriors actually described in LMU § 16 (Hull 1949, ll.191–203) as victims of Fergus’ campaign of revenge upon his return to Emain. Following Deirdriu’s birth, Cathbad predicts that Fiachna mac Conchobuir, Gerrce mac Illadan and Eogan mac Durthacht will be slain upon her account (LMU ll.70, 72, 74) in response to the ‘crime’ (*bail*) she will commit against Conchobor (cf. 2.2.1, above). Of those warriors named in § 5, however, Gerrce mac Illadan is not mentioned again within the extant text, Eogan mac Durthacht is absent from the narrative between the time of the death of Noísiu, and Conchobor’s decision to transfer Deirdriu into his company (and is apparently unharmed by Fergus during his warriors’ assault upon Emain), and whilst a warrior named Fiachna is noted as having been dispatched by ‘a single spear thrust’ of Dubthach’s (ll.193–94), he is described as the son of Conchobor’s daughter Feidelm, rather than as a son of the king’s. Within § 16, moreover, in addition to Eogan mac Durthacht’s absence, three warriors whose names and actions have not previously occurred during the text are described as recipients of particular vengeance during the assault: Mane mac Conchobuir, slain by Dubthach, and two sons of Traiglethan, slain by Fergus (ll.193–95).

In response to these discrepancies, Hull (1949, 29–30) suggests that Cathbad’s prophecy within LMU § 5 should be seen as an interpolation to the otherwise unitary text, thus accounting, for example, for the absence of Gerrce mac Illadan from all subsequent proceedings. His suggestion is accepted by Ó Háinle (2008, 450), who proposes, however, that § 16 itself, by reason of the otherwise unattested presence of the sons of Traiglethan, should also be seen as material extraneous to the chronology of the surrounding episodes. Given the precision with which the majority of episodes within LMU have been composed (e.g. 2.2.4, above), however, it is difficult to accept, as Máire Herbert suggests, that the redactor of the LL text was simply “unconcerned about minor story details” (1992a, 60), especially as the content of §§ 5 and 16 was not subject to correction by subsequent redactors, i.e. within the later copies of LMU in YBL and Egerton 1782. Two possibilities occur: firstly, that the variety of named warriors said to have been killed in Emain following the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* reflects the author’s knowledge of several alternative traditions relating to periods of great upheaval at Conchobor’s court – not all of which, moreover, may have originally involved Deirdriu (cf. 1 1.2, above). In itself, this explanation of the discrepancy still presupposes a certain amount of carelessness upon the part of the author who, we must assume, failed either to notice, or attempt to integrate, his inclusion of separate, conflicting accounts. The second possibility – that the author of LMU is drawing upon an earlier version of Deirdriu’s involvement with the *maic Uislenn* (outlined below) – whilst initially more complicated, acknowledges the wider variety of source material which the

compiler of LMU (within LL, the earliest extant copy) may have had at his disposal, as well as the largely seamless manner with which the rest of his text has been assembled.

In his cogent description of the dissemination of material relating to Deirdriu, Fergus and the *maic Uislenn*, Cathal Ó Háinle speculates that, prior to its reworking as an “apologia” for the departure of Fergus from Ulster (2008, 451), Deirdriu’s association with the *maic Uislenn*, and the brothers’ own exile from Emain upon her account, circulated in the form of a simple *aithed*, or wooing-tale, namely the *Aithed Derdrinne re macaib Uislenn* found in Tale List A (Mac Cana 1980, 30; cf. 1 1.6, above). The influence of this *aithed*, he notes, may also be suggested by the form of the *ceist* posed within the opening line of LMU (*‘cid dia mboí longes mac nUsnig’?* rather than the *‘cid dia mboí longes Fhergusa’*, which much of the rest of the tale may have led a later audience to expect). Ó Háinle suggests that the *aithed*, a “love story of Deirdre and Naoise” (2008, 451), was drawn upon by the redactor of LMU, alongside other material (such as the now-fragmentary *Fochunn loingse Fergus mac Roig*), in order to create a revised, less unedifying version of the cause of Fergus’ departure from Conchobor’s court (ibid.; cf. Breatnach 1994; Carney 1983, 125). If his suggestion is correct, and if an earlier form of Deirdriu’s association with the *maic Uislenn* also described the course of her life prior to her first meeting with Noísiu,¹⁰⁸ such a tale might plausibly have included a prophecy of similar format to the one made by Cathbad following Deirdriu’s birth, in § 5 of LMU, in which it is possible that suffering or death for several persons involved in the couple’s elopement may also have been foretold. The continued presence of ‘Gerrce mac Illadan’ within this revised version of the *aithed*, therefore, may indicate reliance by its author upon an earlier version of a wooing-tale involving Deirdriu’s relationship with Noísiu, in which a character of this name played some more significant part.

Both Hull (1949, 30), and Ó Háinle (2008, 451), also note that the doomed warriors named by Cathbad’s prophecy in § 5 of LMU – Fiachna mac Conchobuir, Gerrce mac Illadan, and Eogan mac Durthacht – correspond exactly to a list of warriors said to have been killed by Fergus, found within the opening section of *Aided Fhergusa mac Roich* (Meyer 1993, 32), a description of Fergus’ death occurring in two fourteenth-century manuscripts, YBL itself, and Edinburgh Adv. MS 72.1.40.¹⁰⁹ The implication of both critics’ commentary is that the duplication of the named warriors, i.e. Fiachna mac Conchobuir *et. al.*, results from the proximity of the YBL text of LMU to the YBL version of *Aided Fhergusa*, as if the compiler of the YBL text had referred to the version of LMU also contained within that manuscript, in order to refresh his memory of Fergus’ contribution. Certain other ‘biographical’ details included within the opening section of *Aided Fhergusa* would initially appear to support this hypothesis, e.g. that Fergus and his warriors were

¹⁰⁸ There are other reasons, however, to think that it might not have done so; cf. 2.3, below.

¹⁰⁹ Formerly Edinburgh MS. Adv. Lib. 40.

often abroad during their sojourn at the court of Ailill and Medb, a possible reference to the *tána*, such as *Táin Bó Flidais*, in which Fergus played a prominent role (a version of TBF is also included in YBL, at cols. 345–64). This argument, however, cannot be sustained. Not only does the YBL version of *Aided Fhergusa* occur earlier [col. 343] within the manuscript than the version of LMU [cols. 749.20–753], but the YBL text is only six lines in length, and omits all reference to Fergus’ exploits outwith Ulster, aside from the fact that he was killed by Ailill during an excursion into Connacht (Hull 1930b, 304). It is the Edinburgh manuscript, the basis for Meyer’s edition of the death-tale (1993), which duplicates the list of warriors whom Fergus allegedly slew. Whilst it remains plausible that the revised version of LMU, from either of its earlier, i.e. pre-fourteenth-century exemplars [LL or YBL], formed a basis for the deeds of Fergus related within *Aided Fhergusa* in the Edinburgh manuscript, the YBL version of *Aided Fhergusa* itself cannot be seen as influential to LMU. Furthermore, it is worth noting that, just as in LMU, the text of *Aided Fhergusa* does not specifically state that the deaths of the three warriors at Fergus’ hand occurred in direct response to their role in the demise of the *maic Uislenn*, although it is probable that the reference was understood in this way, given that the list follows immediately after a description of the misery prevailing in Ulster during the fourteen-year exile of Fergus, Dubthach and Cormac Cond Loinges, each of whom stood as guarantor for the safety of the slain brothers (Meyer 1993, 32).

The YBL version of *Aided Fhergusa* itself, however, contains several more points of interest unnoticed by Hull and Ó Háinle. Given the brevity of the text, it is worth quoting in full: –

Bui Fergus Mac Roig hi Conachtaig iar marbud mac n-Uislend fora chomairce. Gniid-sium síd fri Concobar iar m-bliadain, 7 gelltar ferund 7 crodh dó, 7 ni-roacht sin dó, intan ro-marb Fergus Troiglethan ar comairce Concobair. Indarbthar-som, iar sin, int-í Fergus hi Conachtaib fri re sé m-blíadan. Iar n-eg ConCulaind, tucad ferund ConCulainn do Fergus, 7 luid a seín hi Connachtaib for celide, 7 marbtais Ailill he .i. Fergus, et reliqua [sic].

Fergus mac Roig was in Connacht after the slaying of the sons of Uisliu (who were) under his protection. After a year he made peace with Conchobor, and land and cattle were promised to him, but he did not obtain them when he killed Traiglethan, who was under the protection of Conchobor. Thereupon, the aforesaid Fergus was expelled into Connacht for a period of six years. After Cú Chulainn’s death, the land of Cú Chulainn was given to Fergus, and he went from it into Connacht on a visit, and Ailill killed him, namely Fergus, *et reliqua* (Hull 1930b, 304).

As Hull points out (*ibid.*), the suggestion that Fergus received Cú Chulainn’s lands following his death is echoed by a statement in the LU version of *Táin Bó Flidais* (Best and Bergin 1929, ll.1632–35), as well as by the later tale *Cath Airtig* (Best 1916, 175), although it is curious that a similar assertion is not also made within the YBL text of the cattle-raid itself, which occurs

shortly after *Aided Fhergusa* at cols. 345–64.¹¹⁰ The YBL *Aided Fhergusa* also describes two different periods of time spent by Fergus in exile from Ulster, only the first of which is connected to the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*. An initial exile of a year's duration concludes, after what appears to be an agreement reached with Conchobor guaranteeing land and cattle to Fergus in return for his forgiveness of the difficulty between them (as with the Edinburgh *Aided Fhergusa*, as well as within LMU itself, the earlier reference to the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* invites the assumption that Fergus' revenge upon the warriors named and/ or his rift with Conchobor occurred upon their account, although this is not stated directly by either text). Despite the agreement, Fergus does not obtain the promised lands. He kills a certain Traiglethan, apparently in violation of Conchobor's surety of Traiglethan's safety, and is banished into Connacht for a second time.

The identity of Traiglethan is as cryptic as the reference to the deaths of *Traigthréen mac Traiglethain ocus a bráthar*, in § 16 of LMU. Vernam Hull points out (1949, 122), that the proper noun *Traigthren* (*mac Traiglethain*) seems to mean 'Strong-Foot (son of Broad-Foot)', a similarity of name which makes it tempting to assume either confusion, or deliberate duplication on the part of subsequent redactors, from an original reference to a character of this name who was slain by Fergus for reasons which had nothing to do with the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*. Hull also notes that only the LL text of LMU contains the phrase '*ocus a brathar*', a detail uncorroborated by either YBL or Egerton 1782 (*ibid.*), although at the close of the earliest version of *Tochmarc Emire*, when Cú Chulainn has been granted the chieftaincy of Ulster, 'three sons of Traiglethan – Siduad, Currech and Carman' occur within the list of youths currently said to be in residence at Emain (Meyer 1888, 307). It is difficult to ascertain whether each reference to Traigthréen, or to his sons, originally referred to the same person, as the name does not appear to be common, and occurs, outwith the contexts noted, only within *Echtra Fhergusa maic Léti* (Binchy 1952, 36), and in the episode within *Táin Bó Cuailnge* Recension I, in which Medb attempts to spring battle upon Cú Chulainn whilst he is unarmed: Traigthréen is the name of her messenger (Ó Rahilly 1976, l.1926). What each of these duplications corroborate, however, is Carney's contention that the text of LMU contains references to a wide range of disparate, pre-existing material (1983, 25–27), as well as allusions to characters occurring within source texts originally concerned with Fergus mac Róich, whose former significance to the earlier narrative is no longer apparent (cf. Ó hUiginn 1993).

With regard, moreover, to Ó Háinle's suggestion (2008, 450) that Hull's § 16 of LMU is itself an

110 The texts are separated from each other by three short, unrelated items, but the scribal hand is consistent and it is probably safe to assume a certain continuity of material involved. I am very grateful to Dr Laura Malone of NUI Maynooth, for placing her transcription of the YBL text of *Táin Bó Flidais* at my disposal.

interpolation, it is equally probable that the texts' description of Fergus' return to Emain [i.e. § 16] also draws upon existing scenes from amongst those sources, in which, following an absence from court, he returns to discover that a series of disasters has taken place. The most obvious potentially influential episode is contained within the fragmentary tale known as *Fochunn loingse Fergusa mac Roig*, 'the cause of the exile of Fergus mac Róich', in which Fergus discovers that, during his absence from a feast held at Emain, several strangers have entered, and are found to be occupying his private chamber (Hull 1930a, 295). Given the similarity of the situation within LMU, in which Fergus' absence from Emain is also occasioned by a feast, it is tempting to speculate that the problematic Traightrén/ Traiglethan and/ or his sons, like Gerra mac Illadan, are warriors whose role was much greater in an earlier text known to the author of LMU, and that their deaths at Fergus' hand originally occurred in recompense for a quite different crime committed against him (it is suggestive, for example, that § 16 of LMU does not actually ascribe the demise of Mane, Fiachna maic Feidelm or the sons of Traiglethan to their involvement in the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, in addition to the fact that the statement that Conchobor's honour was 'outraged' [l.194 *ocus sarugud Conchobuir impu*] with respect to Traightrén's death is retained; cf. the YBL version of *Aided Fhergusa*, as above).

There is little cause to doubt the influence of earlier material upon the description, within LMU, of Fergus' avengement of the *maic Uislenn*, and his assault upon Emain. Questions undoubtedly remain, however, concerning the integration of this material into a structure which, but for these sections, is almost seamlessly assembled, in marked contrast to the apparent confusion and duplication exhibited by §§ 5 and 16. If accident, or mere carelessness upon the part of the redactor is discounted, for what reason do the discrepancies in detail between those warriors said to have been slain by Fergus during his assault upon Emain in § 16, and those named by Cathbad in § 5 as future victims of Deirdriu's malign influence, occur? In conjunction with Carney's assertion, that the composition of LMU itself was primarily intended to disassociate Fergus' departure from Ulster from alternative, less edifying explanations of the reasons for his exile – such as those suggested by the remaining fragment of *Fochunn Loingse Fergusa maic Roich* – the correspondence between those warriors named in § 5, and those said to have been killed by Fergus within the opening section of *Aided Fhergusa*, strongly suggests that the apparent confusion occurring within LMU with regard to those persons slain in consequence of the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, results primarily from Fergus' association with the brothers' demise, as well as to his overall presence within the text. Given the incongruity of §§ 5 and 16, in comparison to the intricate composition of the surrounding episodes of LMU, it is not implausible to suggest that the apparent discrepancies displayed by these sections were also intended by their author as an integral component of his text, whose effect upon an audience familiar with the characters involved underlines the actual difficulty of achieving the alleged exoneration of Fergus'

behaviour, when previous accounts of the causes of his departure from Ulster were so well-known. The suggestion that confusion concerning the identity of those warriors who suffered, at Fergus' hands, in consequence of his compromised protection of the *maic Uislenn*, was deliberate, allows us to consider that the author's references to similar situations – e.g. Fergus' role in the death of Traiglethan within the YBL *Aided Fhergusa* – were intended to focus attention upon the much greater preponderance of existing material in which Fergus' conduct is devoid of the honourable connotations otherwise apportioned throughout LMU (also foregrounded by the detail of the text's colophon, that Fergus' exile was brought about in this way [l.318; cf. 2.2.7, below]).

2.2.7: Deirdriu's laments for the *maic Uislenn*; the cause of her death [SI, EVI i, ii, iii; ll.204–320]

12. → *XcXY*. “By her suicide, Deirdriu punishes herself for the misfortunes she has caused, and also punishes Conchobor by depriving him of his pleasures” (Martin 1975–76, 143).

Martin's description of the concluding action of LMU takes for granted that Deirdriu's death results from a conscious intention to end her life. His statement assumes, furthermore, that Cathbad's prophecy [§ 5], in its original apportioning of blame for all subsequent misfortune upon the fact of Deirdriu's survival, is vindicated by her decision to die. He also assumes that her suicide arises from guilt at the knowledge of this culpability (“Deirdriu punishes herself”). Martin's reference to Conchobor's resultant deprivation, moreover, omits consideration of his own behaviour during the period prior to Deirdriu's departure from the chariot (see below). A similar lack of attention is paid to the circumstances in which she and Conchobor spend the year elapsing between the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, and Deirdriu's own demise, although it is fair to say that, with the apparently constant repetition in verse of details concerning her former relationship with Noísiu and his brothers, as well as the role played by Conchobor in their deaths, neither party may be said to have forgotten the circumstances in which their union was initially formed, or subsequently interrupted.

Following the demise of Noísiu [Z -A], Conchobor reasserts control over Deirdriu [Y a], who is brought to him with her hands tied behind her back (LMU ll.189–90 *a lláma íarna cúl*), even as the other exiles are killed, *conna-térna ass*, 'so that none escaped hence' [ll.187–88 = *incipit*]. Conchobor's former custody of Deirdriu resumes, but the girl displays no pleasure in her situation, consuming neither food nor drink, nor responding to Conchobor's musicians' repeated attempts to entertain her [X -A = *setting* I]. In spite of their accompaniment, her sole response is to recite a series of extempore verses [X a], whose repetition is indicated by the use of imperfect verbal forms (ll.206 *do-mbertis*; 207 *as-bered*), repeated, it would appear, whenever attempts are

made to distract her from her torpor [= *incidence* I, *setting* II, recurring]. Upon Conchobor's attempts to staunch her persistent lamenting [= *incidence* II, recurring], she recites a second elegy, which closes with the refrain that she will soon join the brothers in their graves (l.304). At the close of the year, during which no alteration of her state has occurred, Conchobor decides, in response to her statement that she despises himself and Eogan mac Durthacht the most of all persons visible to her, that she must spend a further year with Eogan [Y a = *result* II, *setting* III]. The three of them set off for the assembly of Macha, whereupon Conchobor insults the girl [Y c = *incidence* III], to the extent that she exits the chariot they are travelling in and strikes her head upon a boulder, perishing in consequence [X -A = *result* III].

(Z -A) Y a

→ X -A // X a

= Y a c

→ X -A

Commentary

The *incipit* of this final episode of LMU proceeds from the concluding result of episode 2.2.5 – the death of the *maic Uislenn* – rather than 2.2.6, lending weight to the suggestion, considered above, that the extraneous nature of the intervening material was intended to constitute an obvious intrusion into the otherwise chronological structure of the surrounding narrative.

With the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, the status quo existing between Conchobor and Deirdriu, prior to the brothers' interference in their relationship, is restored, with Deirdriu once again under Conchobor's control. As Buttimer points out, the “indeterminate conjugal union” (1994–5, 27) proposed by Conchobor at the time at which he first assumed custody of the girl, does not appear to materialise at this juncture, despite the absence of further rivals, forestalled upon this occasion by Deirdriu's own reluctance to focus upon her current surroundings. Leborcham, whose interference also facilitated Deirdriu's earlier frustration of Conchobor's authority (as 2.2.3, above), plays no further role within the remaining narrative, in contrast to her continued importance as Conchobor's intermediary, following the exiles' return to Emain, in the comparable section of OCU (cf. 4 1.3.6, below).

Conchobor's repeated efforts to rouse Deirdriu from the state into which she has retreated following the deaths of her former companions – 'I do not sleep now/ and I do not redden my fingernails./ Joy, it comes not into my observation...' (ll.252–54) – fail to evoke a response. The girl replies only with a series of elegies (ll.208–64, 267–306), extolling the virtues of the *maic Uislenn*, and the simple pleasures the four of them enjoyed during their exile in Scotland, such as

cooking the game hunted by the brothers (ll.214, 220–23), or hearing their voices raised in song as they worked (ll.231–35). Buttimer (1994–5, 28–29) argues that the information relayed at this stage of the narrative is greatly superior in detail to that provided at the time of the exile itself, revealing the obviously “intrusive” nature of the verses, yet retrospective depiction of the exiles’ rural idyll, as opposed to the “harassment of the[ir] wandering band” (id., 28), is far more suited to Deirdriu’s current mood of anguished nostalgia, than to an earlier period of the text, prior to the time at which great tragedy impacts. The girl may now, in the wake of the brothers’ betrayal and death, appropriately contrast the superior sweetness of the mead that Noísiu used to bring her, to the drinks she is offered at the present time by the man who betrayed them (ll.216–19), and the cacophony made by his musicians to the former melodiousness of the brothers’ tenor song. Appreciation of the domestic harmony of her life in exile, during the description of the exile itself, would also have intruded upon the tightly-structured narrative describing the company’s interactions with the king of Scotland, and the author’s reversal of events leading to their departure from Ulster. Of greater relevance to Buttimer’s otherwise unconvincing argument,¹¹¹ is the fact that few of the details provided by Deirdriu’s verses are specifically linked to events also described by the surrounding prose – with the telling exception of her statement that ‘[Fergus] has sold his honour for ale’ (l.297) – although this disassociation is by no means an unusual feature of such prosimetra (cf., the verse dialogue between Rónán and Echaid’s daughter, following the death of Mael Fothartaig [Greene 1955, ll.168–92]).

The sweet nostalgia evoked by Deirdriu’s descriptions, coupled with her bitterness towards the perpetrators of her loss – ‘what I deemed most beautiful on earth [... Conchobor has] carried off from me’ (ll.271, 273); ‘fair Fergus has committed trespass against us’ (l.295) – alongside her pathetic demeanour and appearance at the time of the verses’ utterance does, however, support Buttimer’s assertion that her songs should be read as laments for the dead warriors, similar to those made by Créid upon the death of her lover in the battle of Ventry (1994–5, 29). In marked contrast to the beauty possessed by Deirdriu during her adolescence, she is now careless of herself, exclaiming that she neither eats, sleeps, nor attends to the condition of her fingernails (ll.252–59).¹¹² Although it is not also stated that she is subject to the periods of violent activity common to other descriptions of mourning women, such as the protracted beating or wringing of hands (cf. Partridge 1980–1, 29–31), her sleeplessness is characteristic of their restlessness (Larson 2006, 144), as is her propensity to apportion blame (ll.271–74), and it is this aspect of her character, despite its relatively minor role within LMU itself, which has become synonymous

111 He admits, however (id., 30), that attempts have been made to integrate the verse and prose by means of such factors as the repetition of “sound symbolism”, e.g. paralleled references to the brothers’ melodious voices; cf. Sheehan 2009, 63 n.26.

112 It is unclear whether this statement of neglect draws attention to an activity that would ordinarily have been commonplace to a girl who remained concerned with the maintenance of her beauty, i.e. whether particular store was normally set by the condition of a woman’s nails, or if it was common for them to be coloured in some way.

with the name of Deirdriu in Gaelic literary tradition (e.g. Kennedy 1897–98, 172; Fackler 1969, 58; Mathis 2008; cf. 2.3, below).

The final sequence of LMU does not, however, dwell upon Deirdriu's loss of her former companions. The claim made during her second lament, that she will soon reach an early grave (1.304 *mos-ricub mo moch-lige*), should not be taken out of the context in which it is uttered, and several other aspects of the characters' interactions with each other should also be considered as significant. The conversation between Deirdriu and Conchobor, which follows at least one recitation of her laments – the first such verbal exchange between them depicted by the text (cf. 2.3, below) – alongside the description of their subsequent journey to the assembly at Macha with Eogan mac Durthacht, have also been subject to considerable criticism and disagreement, mainly with regard to the intentions of the parties concerned. Given that the characters' actions are devoid of psychological commentary in this as in each other episode of LMU, what remains is the manner in which the series of events said to have occurred are described. It may be discerned from previous, widely-diverse critiques of the sequence in question, however, the variety of ways in which the letter of the text may be – and has been – interpreted. Alongside Martin, Tymoczko (1985–6, 158), and Herbert (1992a, 58), both assume Deirdriu's death to result from deliberate suicide, whilst Joseph Nagy interprets her exit from the chariot as a deliberate leap, an act symbolic of the text's overall heroic demeanour, and one which:

“showcases the hero at his most performative, [and] is characteristically performed in front of an audience, going away from an audience, or coming toward one, and the success of the heroic trajectory depends on its successful execution. The leap also inscribes the arc of story within which the figure of the hero and the values that his heroic behaviour embodies are framed (2009, 17).

He also claims, however, that such a leap “is not always [made] under the control of the heroic leaper” (ibid.), suggesting that he does not share the interpretation of Deirdriu's death – rather than the leap itself – as arising from conscious choice. It is, simply, a dramatic conclusion to a text otherwise organised around her birth, and significant events throughout her life.¹¹³

Differing interpretations of Deirdriu's death have arisen from the paucity of commentary provided by the text itself. The plain fact of Deirdriu's distaste for her current surroundings in comparison to her previous situation, her consistent refusal to respond to Conchobor's overtures, and his decision to transfer her to the custody of Eogan, fails to confirm the extent to which each circumstance leads directly to the next, or whether additional, undisclosed factors might also be seen as influential. Does Deirdriu decide to withhold even a semblance of obedience to

¹¹³ His comment (id., 11–12) that Deirdriu's broken skull represents a “breakdown of the boundaries that give physical bodies their definition”, and an act which “deprives those whom she hates of the opportunity to exploit her as a sign of their triumph over [Noísiu]” will be considered in 2.3, below.

Conchobor's renewed authority over her person as a direct consequence of his treatment of the *maic Uislenn* – as one might reasonably infer from her poetry – or should her listlessness be interpreted as a form of catatonia, into which she has retreated following the traumatic nature of her experience prior to this point of the text? Does Conchobor experience any form of guilt concerning his treatment of the *maic Uislenn*, thus rendering Deirdriu's accusations pertinent, and resulting in a desire to rid himself of her presence, or should his decision to transfer her into Eogan's custody merely be read as an indication of his anger at her refusal or inability to respond?

The letter of the text itself contains insufficient evidence to substantiate any of these claims. Only the opening line of Deirdriu's second lament hints at the nature of Conchobor's attitude towards the girl during their year together after Noísiu's death, when it is stated that, upon the occasion of her first lament being recited, 'Conchobor used to mollify her' (l.265 *no-bíd Conchobor oca hálgenugud-si*). Verses of the lament testify both to the girl's neglected appearance (ll.252–59, as above), and to the quietly dignified contrast drawn between her current and former surroundings. In reply to Conchobor's attempt at 'mollification', she enquires 'what ails you?' (l.267 *cíd no-taí?*). Taken together, these elements suggest that Conchobor's words contained one of two things: a platitude, which opined that her current situation was not really cause for such distress, or else a form of apology for his own part in bringing about the demise of the persons for whom she is grieving. That the second of these possibilities should be suspected, is suggested by the following lines of the lament, in which Deirdriu reminds Conchobor that it was his own deeds which have created her current predicament: 'for me you have placed sorrow under weeping./ Indeed, as long as I may abide/ my love for you will not be of very great account' (ll.268–70 *do-rurmís dam brón fo chaí/ is ed ám i céin no-mmair/ do serc lim ní-ba romair*). The preface of this reminder with the enquiry *cíd no-taí?*, moreover, implies that Deirdriu's words express her incredulity that Conchobor can so frequently exhibit ignorance of the cause of her distress, a suggestion strengthened by the final verse of the lament, in which she advises that he should be 'wise' (l.306 *éola*), and accept that her sorrow is too great to be soothed.

No further signs of remorse may reasonably be inferred from Conchobor's speech or behaviour during the scene. In fact, whilst the first words addressed directly by Conchobor toward Deirdriu – 'what do you see that you hate most?' (l.307, *cíd as mó miscais lat at-chí?*) – are not in themselves malicious, there are few other ways in which his reaction to her response may be interpreted (hence the designation, above, of Conchobor's decision as *Y a c*, a narrative action made with the intent to punish another; cf. 2 1.2, above). Upon being told that, besides himself, it is Eogan mac Durthacht whom Deirdriu most dislikes, he determines that she shall be passed from his company into Eogan's (ll.309–11).

It is worth noting, at this point, the precise nature of the question Conchobor poses. He does not ask Deirdriu what it is that she hates most upon the earth – which would have constituted a comparable phrase to her own, earlier declaration, that Conchobor was responsible for carrying off 'that which was most dear to her' upon the earth – but enquires instead what is that she can see (*at-chí*) that is most objectionable, presumably contemporaneous to the moment the question itself is posed. Whilst his meaning could conceivably have referred to a thing that it was possible to see, at another time, or that she had had sight of at an earlier moment in her life, the result of her response is also suggestive: 'he brought her beside Eogan' (l.311 *dus-mbert íarum for láim Eogain*). The immediacy of Conchobor's reaction implies that Eogan mac Durthacht was also present when Deirdriu was asked to name the thing she most disliked, and that he, as well as Conchobor, was actually within her line of vision at the time. The presence of Eogan would suggest that not only has he been restored to Conchobor's favour, presumably as a result of his successful removal of the *maic Uislenn*, but that during the intervening year, Deirdriu has been in close proximity to both the men responsible for destroying the former, apparently contented existence celebrated by her laments. It is true that, unlike Conchobor's, the name of Eogan mac Durthacht does not occur within her songs, though mention is made of the noblemen gathered about her at Emain (l.261), as well as to those gathered specifically around Conchobor (l.300), but the distaste felt for Eogan is confirmed by her response to Conchobor's question, as well as by the statement during their journey to the *oenach* that she had vowed never to see the two men together at the same time (ll.312–13 *do-rarngert-si na-haiccfiuth a dá céile for talmain i n-óen-fecht*) – the principal connection between the men being their culpability in the deaths of Noísiu and his brothers.¹¹⁴

Following Conchobor's decision to transfer Deirdriu into Eogan's custody, the trio set off for the assembly of Macha, an action supporting Philip O'Leary's suggestion that the transfer of guardianship is not complete until its niceties have been publicly observed (1991, 28). He also argues convincingly that Deirdriu's awareness of the extent of her predicament is not fully realised, until Conchobor's final words to her are uttered: 'it is a sheep's eye between two rams that you make between me and Eogan' (ll.314–15 *súil chaerach eter dá rethe gní-siu etrum-sa ocus Eogan*). As Tymoczko has pointed out, the imagery chosen by Conchobor to represent himself, Eogan and Deirdriu – the two rams either side of their sheep – utilises animals of greatly-reduced status than Deirdriu's own comparisons, during her first conversation with Noísiu, of himself and Conchobor with the *tárbin óag* and *tárb in chóicid*, with Deirdriu as willing *samaisc* or suitably-aged heifer (1985–6, 152–3). It is probable, therefore, that the reality

¹¹⁴ Buttimer (1994–5, 32 n.104) is correct to note that Deirdriu's 'vow' never to observe Eogan and Conchobor together at the same time has not been uttered prior to this point, but it is consistent with the suggestion that she has been regularly exposed to both men's company during the previous year.

revealed to her by Conchobor's statement, necessitates her departure from the chariot in which the trio are travelling (contra Pereira 2006, 81).¹¹⁵ The precise level of intention inherent in this act, however, remains unclear. The moments leading to her death are described thus: *ro-baí ail chloiche mór ara cinn. Do-lléici a cenn immon cloich co-nderna brúrig dia cinn co-mbo marb* (ll.316–17), translated by Hull as 'there was a great stone boulder in front of her. She dashed her head against the stone until she had made a mass of fragments of her head, so that she died' (1949, 69).

The material factors within this description are the presence of the boulder, not noted beforehand; the exact means by which Deirdriu's head encounters it; and the extent to which this action may have been deliberate, or accidental. There is no suggestion that the boulder is already in the chariot. Either Deirdriu strikes her head against an overhanging rock whilst the chariot remains in motion (i.e. *ro-baí ail chloiche mór ara cinn*), or she exits the vehicle at some stage during the journey towards the *oenach*, and is thereby placed in proximity to a rock upon the ground. In the latter case, either she leaps from the vehicle whilst it remains in motion, or her behaviour within it, in the wake of Conchobor's insult, requires the chariot to be halted. If so, the likelihood of Deirdriu's death occurring accidentally is small; the only way in which her skull might have achieved its ultimately broken state in this eventuality, is through deliberate and repetitive contact with a boulder within convenient distance of the location at which the chariot comes to a stop (i.e. 'death occurring through suicide', according to the criteria set out by Ingridsdotter 2009, 29). There is no evidence within the text to support this possibility. The alternative interpretation of the statement describing her death is that Deirdriu leaps, deliberately, from the moving vehicle.¹¹⁶ The likelihood of fatality resulting from an attempt to remove oneself from a moving vehicle is much greater, and much more likely to produce the result specified by the text, i.e. her shattered skull, without further intervention.

The paucity of detail provided by the description of Deirdriu's death is compounded by the ambiguity of the terms which describe it, foremost of which is the translation of *co-nderna*, understood by the present writer as the 3 singular non-personal (active) form of *do-gní* (DIL D 292, 32–59 [2h]). Hull's translation rejects the non-personal form, upon the arbitrary grounds that the "occurrence of the same locution in other texts [involves] no impersonal construction" (1949, 160). LL, YBL and Egerton, however, are consistent in their employment of *co-nderna*, with neither version glossed, and, in conjunction with the information contained in the preceding sentence, that the resultant 'mass of fragments' occurs after Deirdriu's head has made contact with

¹¹⁵ The statement also represents the only indication during LMU of Conchobor's personal opinion of Deirdriu (see below, 2.3). I am grateful to Abigail Burnyeat for this observation.

¹¹⁶ Not that her death, itself, is pre-meditated – this possibility refers to the intention to depart from the chariot alone.

the boulder, it is more probable that a single moment of contact is indicated (i.e. ‘death occurring through accident’; Ingridsdotter *op. cit.*). In other words, the girl's departure from the chariot, itself intentional in response to Conchobor's insult, combined with the vehicle's ongoing motion, propels her into the path of the boulder, whereupon her head shatters: i.e. ‘there was a great stone boulder in front of her. She struck her head against the stone so that it made a mass of fragments of her head, so that she died’. Restoration of *co-nderna* in its non-personal locution transforms the provocative image arising from Hull's translation, i.e. ‘she dashed her head against the rock’, from which it is difficult to detach the implication of a deliberately contrived death (cf. Bruford 1969, 102).

The series of events culminating in Deirdriu's death must also be considered in comparison to the demise of two other women, Búan and Créid, whose textual depiction shares several of the narrative elements of LMU (cf. Carney 1955/ 1979, 215–17).¹¹⁷ Búan, daughter of Samer, is killed as she attempts to leap into a chariot driven by Cú Chulainn, to whom she has given love-in-absence. Créid, daughter of Guaire, loves the warrior Cáno, and is devastated by reports of his death. A description of Búan's death occurs in *Fled Bricrenn* (Windisch 1880, 290 [LU 109b]; Henderson 1899, 90 [LU, varia from Egerton 93]), and is also given in explanation for several eponymous place-names within both the *Metrical* and *Prose Dindshenchas* (*Fích mBúana*; Gwynn 1924, 180; *Úaig Búana*; id., 294; cf. *Fích mBúana*; Stokes 1895, 57–58). Each account refers to the girl, the moving chariot, and an object against which the girl's head strikes as she leaps towards it, but a certain amount of confusion is evident when these descriptions are compared (cf. Nagy 2009, 18), and it is possible that at some stage more than one account was in circulation.¹¹⁸ Their collective similarity to the way in which Deirdriu's demise is said to have occurred, however, is undeniable, as is certain critics' ambiguity regarding analyses of Búan's action and/ or accident, in leaping after Cú Chulainn's chariot and meeting her death in the

117 I am grateful to Dr Kicki Ingridsdotter and Esther Le Mair for sharing several insightful observations upon the deaths of Deirdriu and Búan, and to Dr Ingridsdotter for the draft of her paper, ‘Suicide and death in early Ireland’, presented at the Tionól at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies in November 2008.

118 George Henderson (1899, 177) speculated that the *all* referred to as the location of Búan's leap “might almost seem as if [...] a part of the chariot [was meant], but this cannot be definitely made out”. DIL s.v. *all* has 1: rock, stone, etc.; but also 2: ‘rein, bridle’, e.g. *tricha aill .i. srían* (O'Donovan et.al. 1865, 124, 1.14), suggesting that *all*, especially in this context, may indeed have referred to part of the chariot, rather than to a rock or stone upon the ground beneath it. If *all* is read in this way, Búan's death occurs when ‘she leapt a dreadful leap upon the reins/ bridle in [the chariot's] wake’ (taking *inadláid* as *in-a-d(h)iaidh*, referring to *carpait*). The plausibility of this depends upon the likelihood of death occurring in consequence of becoming entangled in some part of the chariot's reins, or the bridle of its horse/s, a reading, moreover, not immediately supported by *Fled Bricrenn*'s, *co n-ecmaing a tul immon n-all*, in which use of *ecmaing* (vn. *ad-cumaing*) suggests primarily that the forehead (*tul*) must have had something more solid against which to strike. In later usage, *ecmaing* also carried the more general sense of ‘happened, occurred’, hence perhaps ‘so that her (fore)head happened upon the reins’, i.e. she became entangled in them whilst leaping after Cú Chulainn? (cf. DIL s.v. 2 *ad-cumaing*, ‘reaches, extends to’, which might also support use of *all* as ‘reins, bridle’/ Henderson's ‘part of the chariot’). Given the etymologies of *Fích mBúana* and *Úaig Búana*, however, it appears that Búan's death was primarily associated with DIL *all* 1 rather than 2 (cf. *a dith ‘mon all* in *Metrical Dindshenchas* 180.120 [Gwynn 1924], although it is not inconceivable that *all* referred to a rock or stone in the first instance, and to some part of the chariot itself in the second).

process. The *Metrical Dindshenchas* declares: *and rochúala a díth 'mon all/ hi Fích Búana na mbúaball: / ní mucechaing céim hi fat, /ní fúair in mbéim dia tarat* (Gwynn 1924, 180 [*Fích mBúana*]), 'I have heard how she perished there upon the rock at *Fích Buana* of the oxen: a luckless way she went afar; she dealt a blow to one that felt it not' (i.e. to Cú Chulainn). A fuller exposition occurs under the entry for *Úaig Búana: roleblaing sí lem n-úathmar ina dhíaidh-seom, co n-ecmaing a tul imón all dofuiris in carpat* (Gwynn 1924, 294), '[Búan] leapt a dreadful leap after him, and struck her forehead against the rock that stopped the chariot'. The detail is echoed by, and possibly copied from, the LU text of *Fled Bricrenn* (*Ro lebling ind ingen trá léim n-úathmar ina diaid-sium for fuiris in charpait, co n-ecmaing a tul immon n-all, co m-bo marb de, conim de ainmuighther Úaig Búana; cf. roleblaing iarom an ingen leim n-uathmar tar bernai ina diaigsium for an carpat*, in Egerton 93). The form *dofuiris* for *fuiris*, however, is problematic, and, in a similar way to Hull's acceptance of *co-nderna* in its active locution, has resulted in debate concerning the extent to which the death of Búan may be seen as deliberately contrived. Was she attempting to jump into the chariot alongside Cú Chulainn in order to urge her suit, whereupon he became distracted, lost control of the vehicle and failed to avoid making contact with the rock ('*dofuiris in carpat*') against which Búan's head then strikes? The contention that the chariot was halted in its progress by a boulder arises, however, only from Edward Gwynn's interpretation of *dofuiris* as an unusual s-preterite verbal form (1924, 454). His commentary upon the etymology of Búan's place of death notes that: "*dofuiris* seems to be a verb; I regard it as a middle-Irish s-pret. of *dofuirigim*... cf. ZCP xiii. 256, 13 *dofuiris in tai[d]bsiu* 'the apparition stopped her' (?) [Thurneysen 1921b, 256]. If this is accurate, the clause *for fuiris in charpait* in LU may be altered to *fofuiris in carpat*, and placed after *immon n-all*". Gwynn's interpretation of *dofuirigim* as a late form of *fo-rig* is unsupported by DIL, whose entry for *fuiris* comments that **dofuirigim* is "very doubtful" and suggests, instead, that *for fuiris* represents a variation of *for slicht* (e.g. *diasloí for slicht a charpait* in *Metrical Dindshenchas* 180 l.4, which Gwynn has already been content to accept as 'track'). If Gwynn's putative verb-form is rejected, his rearrangement of the sentence in which it occurs should also be questioned, and a restoration of *ro lebling ind ingen trá léim n-úathmar ina diaid-sium for fuiris in charpait*, as in *Fled Bricrenn*, seems appropriate (translating 'the girl leapt a dreadful leap after [Cú Chulainn] in the track of his chariot'; cf. *luidh ingen Saméra [Búan] for lorcc na trí carpad; Úaig mBúana*, Gwynn 1924, 294).

The death of Créid suffers from markedly less ambiguity than those of Deirdriu and Búan. Créid loves Cano even before their first meeting at her husband's house. During his visit, Cano promises to marry her, should he succeed in achieving the kingship of Scotland. A long and frustrating campaign prevents this from occurring, and the lovers meet only infrequently. Arriving at one such rendezvous, Créid witnesses what she believes to be Cano's death,

becoming distraught and meeting her own death shortly afterwards. Describing her demise, the text states that *co-nderna brúar dia cind imon carraic* (Binchy 1963, 1.509; cf. LMU II.316–17 [*immon cloich*] *co-nderna brúrig dia cinn*). With regard to the verb, Binchy suggests that *co-nderna* [MS] may be read either as *co-ndernad* or as ‘the older’ *co-ndeirgni* (ibid.) – i.e. with ‘passive’ locution – but the context of Créid’s demise suggests that, in this instance, a deliberate decision to break her head against the stone is indicated (translating ‘so that she made fragments of her head about the stone’; cf. Dillon 1943, 15). Unlike the series of events culminating in the deaths of Deirdriu and Búan, there is no suggestion that Créid was influenced by emotions other than grief; she has no one from whom to flee, unlike Deirdriu; and, unlike either of the other women, her death is not connected with the motion of a moving vehicle, making it much less likely for her skull to have been damaged through accident.

With regard to the similarity between descriptions of the deaths of Deirdriu, Búan and Créid, it is difficult to establish in which direction any potential influences may be seen to lie. In spite of its overarching focus upon struggles for succession in early Scotland, and the alleged exploits of its titular hero during the reign of Áedán mac Gabráin (cf. Fraser 2009, 205), *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* exhibits several elements heavily reminiscent of Continental romances of the Tristan-type, namely Créid’s use of a sleeping potion in order to speak privately with her lover, and the fact that her death proceeds from an incorrect apprehension that Cano has been killed (Dillon 1945, 13–14; Carney 1955/ 1979, 216–17). The only surviving copy of the text occurs in YBL at columns 786–94 (LMU occurs at 749–53), and it seems highly unlikely that its author was unaware of the manner in which Deirdriu’s death is depicted only pages before (whether or not the method, as well as the manner, of Créid’s death was influenced by Deirdriu’s is less clear, but several other episodes throughout *Scéla Cano* certainly denote external influences; cf. Dillon 1945, 13). The descent of texts in which the death of Búan is described is rather more complicated. Reference to Búan is absent from Edinburgh Adv. Lib. 72.1.40 (14th century), the second earliest extant, albeit fragmentary, copy of the first recension of *Fled Bricrenn* (Meyer 1893, 450–58; cf. Mackinnon 1912, 157). The version of *Fled Bricrenn* [= recension II] which occurs in YBL, at columns 759–65, also omits all reference to this episode (Hollo 1992, 18–24). Of the versions extant prior to several, post-fifteenth-century copies of recension I, only the copy in *Lebor na h-Uidre* (circa 1106; Best and Bergin 1929, 270 [at II.8928–35]) contains the description of Búan’s death (*ro lebling ind ingen trá léim n- úathmar ina diaid-sium for fuiris in charpait, co n-ecmaing a tul immon n-all, co m-bo marb de*, as above), alongside the designation of its location as *Úaig Búana* (id., 1.8835). Notice of *Úaig Búana* and *Fich mBúana* occurs within the versions of the *Metrical* and *Prose Dindsenchus* interspersed throughout LL, although the LL

text has only the first stanza of the latter verse (Gwynn 1924, 181).¹¹⁹ Búan's death, accordingly, is described in full, in prose form, only in folio 166 r ll.21–35 (beginning *Búan ingen Samera dorat grad do Choin Culaind*, 'Búan daughter of Samera gave her love to Cú Chulainn'; Best and Bergin 1957, 742). Its location within the manuscript, some 25 pages prior to the copy of LMU in LL, offers little clue as to the direction of potential influence regarding the manner in which the women's deaths are described, especially since the *dindsenchus* of *Fich mBúana* is also found in several other manuscripts of overlapping date (listed in Gwynn 1924). The similarity of circumstance in addition to the duplicated, potentially confused locution of *co-nderna* should not, however, be overlooked.

The text of LMU, therefore, provides little support for the contention that Deirdriu deliberately contrives her own death. It is the opinion of the present writer that the death of Deirdriu occurs as an unanticipated consequence of her departure from the chariot shared with Conchobor and Eogan mac Durthacht, and does not result from a deliberate intention to end her life (cf. O'Flanagan 1808, 139; O'Curry 1862, 408). The question that must then be addressed is this: why does Deirdriu die? Accepting accident as the cause of her death invalidates, for instance, Maria Tymoczko's conclusion that Deirdriu's decision to kill herself constitutes the ultimate "assertion of her human self", in opposition to Conchobor's designation of the girl as a sexualised animal, a sheep in the chariot between himself and Eogan mac Durthacht (1985–6, 153). If her death is unintentional, what then is its significance? The fact that her final moments conclude the text of LMU, whose narrative closes with the depiction of her fractured skull upon the ground, suggests that the fragments themselves, as well as the suddenness of Deirdriu's disintegration from fully-formed person to broken shell, represent the consequential disintegration of Ulster itself, as LMU progresses (cf. Nagy 2009, 11–12). The fragments of skull comprise a stark contrast to the beauty formerly possessed by Deirdriu, celebrated by Cathbad's prophecy, and initially of sufficient attraction to Conchobor to ensure that he spares her life. The manner in which her death is achieved, resulting not from conscious intention but in consequence of the actions of another character (i.e. Conchobor), supports not only the predominant passivity of Deirdriu's role within LMU, but also the way in which reckless or unheeding acts performed throughout the text ultimately impact upon persons other than the acts' perpetrator, usually to the detriment of the former. Conchobor's disregard for the demands of his kingship results in the destruction of the means by which that kingship has been tested throughout the course of the text, i.e. in the death of Deirdriu (see 2.3, below). The ultimate *result* of LMU (as 2 1.2, above) is fragmentation, destruction and needless waste, predicated by Conchobor's lack of judgement

119 Gwynn's edition obscures the fact that the stanza referred to has also been appended by the editor to the prose passages – LL fol. 166 r ll.21–31 – describing the initial reasons for Cú Chulainn's circuit into Búan's homeland. LL contains these ten lines of prose, followed by the single four-line stanza; only later versions of the *Dindsenchus*, e.g. the Books of Uí Máine and Ballymote, contain the six-stanza verse.

throughout the text.

2.3: The composition of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and the characterisation of Deirdriu

Figures 3 and 4 summarise the incidence of characters' actions and moods within each episode of LMU.

Episode	2.2.1	2.2.2	2.2.3	2.2.4	2.2.5	2.2.6	2.2.7
Description	(UA) X a [X -A] → S a // Fe. -A // M a → Ca. a [X -A] = (U -A) Y b	(Y b) Fo. a → L b // Z a [N]	(L b) X b [→ X b] = X -A // Z C // Z -A → {Ai./ Ar. a [Ai./ Ar. C]} → Y/ U c = X/ Z/ Ai./ Ar/ Ex. a [-A ?]	(X Z Ai. Ar. Ex. -A) Z Ai. Ar. b (Ws -A) → W a // S a = W S b // Z Ai. Ar. C → W b // X a // Z Ai. Ar. a {U a // Ex. A}	(Y a) Y b → F - A + Y a = E a// Fi. C// Z -A	(Z -A) D a// F a = Y -A → Ex. a// Ex. - A	(Z -A) Y a → X -A // X a = Y a c → X -A

Figure 3: summary of narratological episode descriptions

From the resultant summary of characters' deeds and moods (figure 4, overleaf), it will be noted that Conchobor performs a total of seven actions during the course of LMU, Deirdriu six, and the *maic Uislenn* four apiece. The king of Scotland [*rí Alban*] contributes three. Proportionally-speaking, these characters' actions might be thought to exercise the most influence upon the development of the narrative, but, upon closer examination further refinement of the criteria is necessary. Different actions have varying impact upon the subsequent course of events, whilst others are only performed by the character in question in response to the previous action/s of someone else, and do not arise independently. Five of Deirdriu's contributions to the development of LMU fall into the latter category. The sixth, her request to be removed from Ulster, has, with the exception of Conchobor's earlier decision to preserve the girl's life, the most impact of any one action performed within the text, given that it precipitates the embedded episode, the exiles' sojourn in Scotland, in which each event leading to their departure from Ulster is paralleled (as 2.2.4, above). Deirdriu's active role in bringing about this departure is, therefore, out of character in comparison with her passivity during the rest of the tale (see below), and it is tempting to suggest that, for the formulation of this particular episode, the author of LMU had some other source in mind upon which to draw.

A similar suggestion has recently been made by Cathal Ó Háinle (2008, 450), with reference to the occurrence of the title *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn* within Tale-List A (MacCana 1980, 46). In an article examining the 'shifting emphases' of material in which Deirdriu is depicted, Ó Háinle posits the influence of this text (no longer extant) upon the composition of the

later tale of OCU. There is no reason not to suppose, however, that a series of events known by this title would not also have been influential to the author responsible for shaping LMU itself.¹²⁰ The earliest datable copy of LMU occurs in LL, composed circa 1160. Whilst this manuscript also includes the earliest extant copy of Tale-List A, it is notable that the Tale-List itself does not make reference to a tale entitled 'Longes mac n-Uislenn': only *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn* occurs. Although the existence, at this time, of the text now known as LMU, is confirmed by its own inclusion within LL, it may well be significant that the text itself lacks a title within the manuscript. Gregory Toner suggests that the parent copy of Tale-List A, termed O, should be dated to the tenth century (2000, 102–04 [cf. Sproule 1987, 198–9] 113–14; as 1 1.6, above), which, if correct, would support an hypothesis that some earlier version of events, concerned in one form or another with a relationship arising between Deirdriu and Noísiu, was formerly known as an *aithed* rather than a *longes*.

Character	Action (narrative verbs)				Mood					
	a	b	c	Total actions performed	A	-A	B	-B	C	-C
Conchobor [Y]	3	2	2	7		1				
Feidlimid mac Daill [F]				0		1				
Feidlimid's wife [M]	1			1						
Sencha mac Ailella [Se]	1			1						
Cathbad [Ca.]	1			1						
The Ulster warriors [U]	1		1	2		1				
Deirdriu [X]	4	2		6		5				
Deirdriu's foster-father [Fo.]	1			1						
Leborcham [L]		1		1						
Noísiu [Z]	3	1		4		2			2	
Ainnle [Ai.]	3	1		4					2	
Ardán [Ar.]	3	1		4					2	
The exiles [Ex.]	2			2	1	1				
<i>Rí Alban</i> [W]	1	2		3						
The steward [S]	1	1		2						
The men of Scotland [Ws]				0		1				
Fergus [F]	1			1		1				
Dubthach [D]	1			1						
Fiachu mac Fergusa [Fi.]				0					1	
Eogan mac Durthacht [E]	1			1						

Figure 4: characters' deeds and moods (in order of appearance within LMU)

Key to table: – **a** = 'modifier la situation'; **b** = 'accomplir un méfait'; **c** = 'punir'; **A** = the attribute 'happy, fortunate'; **B** = 'être en rapport sexuel'; **C** = 'heroic'.

Whilst the content of this earlier version may only be surmised, the fact that Deirdriu's name

¹²⁰ The same title is considered by Mac Giolla Léith (1993, 19–21), who reaches the opposite conclusion with regard to its potential influence.

occurs within the Tale-List title suggests that her role within this version was greater, and, perhaps, that she enjoyed throughout the *aithed* text an autonomy of behaviour present within LMU only during the scene in which she and Noísiu first meet (in order, perhaps, to facilitate most conveniently the exiles' departure for Scotland). If the putative *aithed* is compared to the usual course of events occurring within other surviving examples of the genre, moreover, notably *Aithed Bláthnait ingine Puill maic Fhidaig re Coin Culaind* [= *Aided Con Roí*], it seems probable that an earlier description of the course of Deirdriu's relationship with Noísiu would also have involved their defiance of an existing union, as well as some sort of journey undertaken in order to escape the consequences of that defiance – i.e. an elopement – just as their first meeting within LMU itself necessitates both partners' removal from Ulster.¹²¹ In other words if, as seems plausible, an earlier tale known as *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn* once existed, it is possible that the author of LMU drew upon certain events within it which were useful for the furtherance of his purpose in composing LMU itself, just as studies by Carney (1983), Breatnach (1994), and Ó hUiginn (2006) have demonstrated the use made within both LMU and OCU of existing material relating to the departure of Fergus mac Róich from Ulster (cf. Ó Háinle 2008, 451; as 2.2.6, above). If this were so, details borrowed from the *aithed* text may also have been significantly altered by the author of LMU, reshaping its most useful episodes to reflect his current purpose. Judging by the opening sections of *Aided Con Roí*, it seems unlikely that a description of Deirdriu's life, prior to the time of her first meeting with Noísiu, would have been explored by the text of the putative *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, with the obvious exception of some sort of explanation as to why she was unable to form a union with Noísiu unopposed (cf. *Aided Con Roí* [Best 1905, § 4], in which Bláthnait is described only as the daughter of Iuchna, who loved Cú Chulainn, but was carried off as a spoil of war by Curói).¹²²

The episode describing the sojourn of the exiles in Scotland suggests another potential focus for alteration. It has already been proposed (as 2.2.4, above) that the lack of detail concerning the location of the unnamed king of Scotland's court may, contrary to the detail of the later tradition, reflect a relative lack of authorial and/ or audience knowledge concerning Scotland and its inhabitants. The perfunctory description of *rí Alban* within LMU might also result, however, from the simpler hypothesis that he was introduced into the *aithed* version's account of the exiled couple's absence from Ulster, in order that Conchobor's behaviour towards Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn* prior to their departure could be paralleled, by a character whose only descriptive

121 Bláthnait helps Cú Chulainn to kill her husband, Curói, and relocates from his stronghold to Cenn Bera, within Conchobor's territory (Best 1905, §§ 4, 14).

122 With regard to the suggestion that Gerce mac Illadan's problematic presence within § 5 of LMU may reflect his more significant role in an earlier version (as above, 2.2.5), there is no particular reason to suppose that this earlier version was not the *aithed* itself.

requirement was that he be described as the equal in status of the king of Ulster.¹²³

It has been argued thus far that, within the extant text of LMU, traces of both an earlier version of Deirdriu's elopement with Noísiu, and alternative traditions concerning the cause of Fergus mac Róich's departure from Ulster, may be discerned. It has been implied that the author of LMU deliberately reshaped this borrowed material to reflect his own purpose in composing the revised text. What, then, was this purpose, and how may it be seen to have affected the arrangement of the actants of the text, upon whose actions and moods the narrative depends, with particular reference to the characterisation of Deirdriu? The first issue which must be addressed is whether or not any connection exists between those characters operative within LMU also found elsewhere within the Ulster Cycle, namely, Cathbad, Sencha mac Ailella, Eogan mac Durthacht and Fergus mac Róich.¹²⁴ The obvious answer is that, outwith the text of LMU, each of these persons are associated with Conchobor, in a manner which, most significantly, brings to LMU a reflection of former discord existing between the king of Ulster and the character in question.¹²⁵ The foremost example is Fergus mac Róich, to whom the kingship of Ulster belonged, until it was appropriated by his erstwhile lover Nes for her son, Conchobor (*Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa* [Stokes 1910, §§5–8]), and by whom, as we have seen, Conchobor was offended with regard to his treatment of Traigléthan (as 2.2.5, above). Cathbad, sometimes stated to be Conchobor's father (e.g. *Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa* [Stokes 1910, §3]), was also involved in the appropriation of Fergus' kingship, and both he and Sencha mac Ailella are found upon several other occasions as the voices of caution against unwise courses of action which Conchobor has proposed (Hollo 1995, 2007). Eogan mac Durthacht's role within LMU, as noted above (2.2.5), is supported by the apparently long-standing feud with Conchobor described in the *macgnímrada* section of *Táin Bó Cuailnge* ('Cath Eógain meic Durthacht fri Conchobor inso'; O'Rahilly 1976, ll.481–523). It is plausible to suggest, therefore, that the supporting cast of LMU was chosen by

123 This hypothesis is also supported by the fact that it appears to be unusual, in tales of the *aithed* type, for difficulties experienced by the eloping couple to be provided by someone other than the person from whom they initially fled; cf. *Aided Con Roí*, in which Curói's poet seeks out Bláthnait and kills her, apparently on behalf of Curói who is unable to avenge himself (Best 1905, § 11).

124 The presence of Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn* is, I suggest, conditioned, at least initially, by their presence within the earlier *aithed*, whilst Leborcham's role appears to represent the potentially devastating effects of satire upon an unjust ruler (see below).

125 Prior to an exploration of the potential *raison d'être* of LMU, it should be noted that the foregoing hypothesis is not intended to disregard the insistence placed throughout this thesis upon the primary importance of intratextual analysis to any detailed critique of a tale such as LMU, i.e. defining the boundaries of the particular text and the information provided, within that text itself, concerning the characters it describes. This insistence remains unaltered. It would be fruitless, however, to deny the fact that the greater majority of the characters with whom the Ulster Cycle is populated are described by more than one tale, and that it would also be more surprising than otherwise if some kind of indication of an author's awareness of existing traditions concerning a particular character could not be seen to have informed its depiction within that author's contribution to the corpus. The exploration of the possible reasons for the composition of LMU proceeds from the supposition that, no matter how strictly the integrity of a single text should initially be observed, its placement within, and relationship to, other texts in which some or all of its characters are also described, is of equal, if not sometimes greater, significance to arguments concerning the depiction of a particular character in a certain way.

its author to reflect the most disadvantageous aspects of Conchobor's kingship of Ulster, in order that the presence of familiar characters with whom he had previously experienced conflict might presage the imminent occurrence of further unrest. This arrangement, in turn, would permit that earlier abuses of Conchobor's sovereignty could be addressed, notably with regard to his usurpation of Fergus' kingship, an act which was never satisfactorily resolved, but which achieves a certain closure within LMU through Fergus' destruction of Emain and his abandonment of even the token loyalty to Conchobor he had previously maintained.¹²⁶

It may be argued, therefore, that the composition of LMU constitutes a comment upon Conchobor's governance of Ulster, and the abuses of his personal rule, agreeing, with Máire Herbert, that the events of the tale provide an exemplum for the proper exercise of kingship and *fír flaithiusa* (1992a, 58). The author's choice and arrangement of Fergus mac Róich, Eogan mac Durthacht, and even Cathbad and Sencha mac Ailella, may be understood within this context. The choice of Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn*, however, might now seem more puzzling. It is a nice question whether or not Conchobor may also have been described within *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn* as the obstacle to the couple's earlier elopement, but it is the most likely explanation for the use of this wooing-tale, and these characters, as a basis for the reshaped LMU.¹²⁷ The prior existence of a tale in which Conchobor was linked to a woman of whose company he was subsequently deprived, seems likely, from comparison to the usual course of events within tales of the *aitheda*-type, to have involved a further instance of wrongdoing, especially if the woman's removal followed the intervention of another, younger warrior (a role which could have been fulfilled by Noísiu but might also, perhaps, have involved Gerrce mac Illadan, whose name alone is now retained by LMU). The relationship within the putative *aithed* between king, younger rival, and woman whom both men desire, would draw the narrative upon which LMU may have been based within the realm of the sovereignty tale type, which many critics have associated only with LMU itself, in its present form. In other words, upon the basis of the characteristics suggested here, it is *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, had a fuller text survived, to which criticism exploring the potential *flaithius*-status of Deirdriu, and her attachment to Noísiu, might have been applied (e.g. Cormier 1976–8; Herbert 1991, 1992a; MacCana 1982; cf. 1 4.3.1).¹²⁸

126 It is significant, however, that this is only episode within LMU in which Conchobor's misdeeds incur an almost immediate reprisal; for the greater part, no consequences arise (cf. 2.4, below).

127 The inclusion of the *maic Uislenn* within *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn* itself, when all other extant descriptions of the brothers emphasise only their martial prowess (as 1 1.2, above), is less surprising in light of the fact that Curói is also defined in these terms, and abducts Bláthnait only after his honour has been impugned by his fellow warriors (Best 1905, § 3).

128 There are obvious difficulties in attempting to extrapolate the probable content of the *aithed* from its potential influence upon LMU alone, and further speculation will not be attempted here, but, in comparison to other examples of the genre, such as *Aided Con Rói*, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the central narrative most probably involved Deirdriu, and one (or more?) of the brothers identified by its title, as well as a

It remains to address the consequences for Deirdriu's characterisation within LMU, if the proposal is made that her presence, primarily, should be seen to constitute a form of commentary upon Conchobor's behaviour throughout the tale. The six occasions upon which an action performed by Deirdriu during LMU affects the subsequent course of the narrative may be outlined as follows:

- The scream which first alerts the assembled Ulstermen to her presence;
- Her covert departure from the *les* in which she has been confined;
- Her request to Noísiu to be removed from Ulster;
- Her departure from Ulster;
- Her warning to Noísiu of the king of Scotland's intention to harm the exiles;
- Her recitation of verses lamenting the three brothers' deaths.¹²⁹

The actual impact of these actions upon the subsequent narrative varies considerably, as does the impetus from which each action may be seen to arise. The action with the most significant effect upon the subsequent course of LMU stems from Deirdriu's first meeting with Noísiu, and her request that he remove her from Ulster. This request also appears, at first glance, to arise unsolicited, i.e. not in response to another action. It is usually interpreted as a decisive implementation, upon Deirdriu's part, of the couple's elopement (e.g. Dooley 1982; Herbert 1992a; Gabriel 1995). Yet the meeting with Noísiu follows directly from Deirdriu's decision to leave the *les* in which she has previously been confined, which decision itself arises from Leborcham's reference to Noísiu, and his greater suitability as an object of her desire (as 2.2.2, above).¹³⁰ Had Deirdriu not left the *les*, she would not have been in a position to speak with Noísiu (it is clear, moreover that Leborcham's own access to Deirdriu during the girl's upbringing is tolerated only for fear of her satires; as 2.2.1, above). The so-called elopement scene, as argued above, would also appear to reflect the partial dependence of LMU upon *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, in which the first meeting of Deirdriu with at least one of Uisliu's sons was almost certainly a focal point of the text, an overall significance not necessarily retained by LMU. Deirdriu's departure from the *les*, therefore, arises from Leborcham's description of Noísiu. This description itself responds to Deirdriu's statement that a man matching the three colours within her sight following the calf's death – red of blood, white of snow, black of raven – could be beloved by her, but it is Leborcham's interpretation of the statement which inspires the

third party, whose presence constituted an obstacle to that relationship.

129 I have not included Deirdriu's description of the man whose colours she might love, for reasons which will be explored below. The sequence of events leading to her death are also omitted, following the earlier conclusion that it should be seen to arise from accident, rather than conscious intent. Its significance for demonstrating the ultimate consequences of Conchobor's disregard for his kingship is outlined above, at 2.2.7.

130 The famous animal imagery with which Deirdriu addresses Noísiu also responds to his prior choice of words, and is not autonomous; cf. 2.2.3, above.

following action, i.e. Deirdriu's attempt to see Noisíu for herself (LMU 1.99, '*ní-pam slán-sa ám [...] conid n-accur-saide*'). The statement alone, whilst providing an indication of the un-socialised girl's current frames of reference (cf. Dooley 1982; Tymoczko 1985–6, 146–49), achieves material significance only with Leborcham's response. Given the disconnectedness of the imagery of the calf's death, compared to earlier events, it is possible that this episode was also borrowed from the *aithed*.

Of the four remaining actions, Deirdriu's physical departure from Ulster occurs in conjunction with the decision of Ainnle and Ardán to uphold their brother's honour, and is not strictly autonomous. In comparison to her earlier departure from the *les*, it is unlikely that she could have left Ulster unaccompanied, or would have had the means to do so. Having uttered the request which ultimately precipitates the exiles' departure, it is necessary, according to the parallelism with which the rest of the episode is arranged (as 2.2.4, above), for a subsequent statement of hers to inspire their return, i.e. Deirdriu's warning of the king of Scotland's plan to harm the *maic Uislenn* and their company. The series of elegies made by the girl at the close of LMU respond to the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, but also comment tacitly upon Conchobor's repeated attempts to alleviate her distress (as 2.2.7, above). Aside from the likelihood that the repetition of the elegies probably contributes to Conchobor's mounting irritation at Deirdriu's torpor, the mere fact of their utterance has no immediate effect upon the course of the narrative.

The final action outlined, i.e. the unborn child's pre-natal shriek, has, for the sake of convenience, also been attributed to Deirdriu, although the events at her father's house take place prior to her actual birth, and prior to her naming (which itself results from Cathbad's prophecy). The Ulstermen's response to the sound erupting, so unexpectedly, from the pregnant woman resembles a call-to-combat, each man arising to stand 'shoulder-to-shoulder' with the others (LMU 11.8–9 *at-raig cach fer di alailiu is-tig lasin scréich í-sin co-mbátar cinn ar chin isin tig*), before their initial distress is pacified by Sencha (11.10–11). Although some few other 'remarkable infants' may be found within the Early Irish corpus (cf. Radner 1990, 177ff.), the Ulstermen's distress upon this occasion seems more pronounced because the source of the dreadful cries cannot be seen. In other words, because the shriek cannot be associated with a particular personality, there is no recognisable threat which may be countered. The anonymity of the scream is compounded when Feidlimid's wife is unable to explain the cause of the noise, and it is only subsequently interpreted by Cathbad as a portent of impending disaster (11.31–79; as 2.2.1, above). The unborn infant is named Deirdriu, even before her birth, apparently from the verb with which her pre-natal movements are twice described (i.e. *derdrethar*; 11.14–15 *cía deilm dremun derdrethar, dremnas fot broinn búredaig?* 11.50–51 *do-rat iar suidiu in Cathbath a láim*

fora broinn inna mná coro-derdrestar in lelap foa láim).¹³¹ Cathbad's prophecy confirms the implied nature of the scream, i.e. that the Ulstermen are under threat from the mere proximity of the unknown, currently externalised presence, which also indicates Deirdriu's continued distance from society throughout the tale.

If the threatening force itself is initially of ambiguous origin, its potential impact is not visited upon the Ulstermen with the same suddenness as the irruption of the shriek itself. In other words, the disturbance at the feast represents an opportunity by which the prophesied disaster may be introduced, whilst its exact manifestation remains inconclusive, and it cannot be insignificant that the presence of Deirdriu, the 'resounding force', even prior to her birth, constitutes the instrument of this disaster, but also the means by which it might have been avoided, had her life not been spared. The decision to preserve her life, in defiance of Cathbad's prophecy, is made by Conchobor, who ignores his warriors' anxiety and declares that the girl shall be raised apart, until such time as their "indeterminate conjugal union" might take place (Buttimer 1994–5, 27). Deirdriu's first appearance within the text, therefore, and the first sound of any kind that she is made to utter, coincides with the first example of an episode in which Conchobor's kingship is put to the test, and the first occasion upon which he singularly fails to pronounce a judgement in the better interests of his subjects. As Máire Herbert has noted, "having taken the first injudicious decision with regard to [Deirdriu], all the king's subsequent breaches of the principles of justice and truth seem to follow inevitably" (1992a, 58), and, furthermore, that "each [subsequent] phase of the drama is set in motion by the action or reaction of the king" (1992a, 55). Each phase, as well as each of Conchobor's responses, is predicated by his successive interactions with Deirdriu. Throughout the course of LMU, three situations are presented in which Conchobor's decisions with regard to the girl result in negative consequences for his kingdom as a whole, or for specific individuals thereof (notably, for the *maic Uislenn*). These may be outlined as follows: -

1. Conchobor chooses to preserve Deirdriu's life in defiance of his warriors' concerns;
2. He secretly arranges the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, whilst pretending to allow their return, and reneges upon his guarantees for their safety;
3. He arranges Deirdriu's transferral to the custody of Eogan mac Durthacht, despite being aware that, apart from himself, it is Eogan whom she most despises.

It is notable that each situation encroaches upon a particular aspect of Conchobor's kingship. LMU is one of the few Ulster Cycle tales in which he is not initially described as having a wife,

¹³¹ It is unclear whether this scenario, and the resultant name of the child, has also been borrowed from the *aithed*, the simplest explanation but for the fact that alternative etymologies for the name have been suggested (e.g. Ní Chatháin 1979–80, 210–11).

but his appropriation of Deirdriu, which might have been presented as an attempt to obtain one, is actually far more ambiguous, and far less official. It does not follow from a statement that Conchobor 'had been without a wife for a long time' (cf. *Fingal Rórdán* ed. Greene 1955, 1.7); nor is it marriage in which his preservation of her life is intended to culminate. Instead, we must assume, his attraction to Deirdriu is dependent upon Cathbad's prediction of her future beauty, as well as the misguided conviction that taking her under his protection will negate the devastating effects of her presence upon Ulster (cf. Herbert 1992a, 57–58). His covert arrangement of the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, and his betrayal of both their surety and, thereby, the honour of their guarantors, also disregards the interdependent relationship supposed to exist between a monarch and his subjects.¹³² Thirdly, his decision to transfer Deirdriu into Eogan's custody cannot be considered other than vindictive, given that no alternative motive is suggested. It does not appear, as might have been plausible, that Eogan was promised a period of time in which to enjoy the company of the girl taken from the *maic Uislenn*, as a further reward for his participation in their deaths. The remark which precipitates Deirdriu's departure from the chariot should also be read in these terms. It appears to result from Conchobor's irritation at her persistent failure to respond to his presence, when neither irritation nor wounded pride are emotions by which a king should allow himself to be governed. The final verse of Deirdriu's second lament for the *maic Uislenn* (LMU 1.306) also tacitly accuses Conchobor of ignorance (as 2.2.7, above), in direct contrast to the intelligence and self-awareness which a king ought properly to possess, and to exercise.

With the depiction within LMU of these interactions between Conchobor and Deirdriu, Conchobor is found lacking in the essential qualities of kingship and *fír flaithiusa*. It is significant that, had he responded differently upon the first occasion upon which his powers of judgement were called to account, there would have been, arguably, no further narrative. Had he allowed the newborn girl to be killed by his warriors, unmoved by claims of her future beauty, the child's threat to Ulster's safety would have been negated. His preservation of Deirdriu's life suggests, from the beginning of the narrative, that a depiction of Conchobor as a monarch capable of achieving the transcendence of self demanded by his status was not (pace Herbert 1992, 55), the objective of the author of LMU, a suspicion confirmed by his presentation of several other abuses of *fír* throughout the text, as above.

If it is true, however, that the author of LMU composed his tale, at least in part, with the intention of demonstrating Conchobor's unsuitability to retain the kingship of Ulster,¹³³ it remains to consider why Conchobor himself experiences few consequences of his poor judgement. We must

132 The argument that the *maic Uislenn* have also flouted this convention, by removing Deirdriu, turns upon the complicated question of whether Conchobor can be dishonoured by the deprivation of a girl of whom he ought not to have taken possession (cf. Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 15).

133 The author's other intention being to revisit the causes of Fergus' departure from Ulster (as 2.2.5, above).

assume, since nothing to the contrary is implied, that Conchobor's status at the close of the tale is unchanged. Fergus' destruction of Emain, and the deaths of Ulster's young women, are depicted as his and Dubthach's personal response to the demise of the *maic Uislenn* and the violation of their surety and honour. Although, by its very nature, an assault upon his kingdom, the physical embodiment of his kingship, constitutes an assault upon Conchobor's person and the totality of his power, it is not stated that he himself is harmed. Deirdriu's death, instead, concludes LMU, in consequence of Conchobor's spite and lack of judgement (as above, 2.2.7).

There exists, however, a further series of circumstances in which issues pertaining to Conchobor's judgement and the nature of his kingship of Ulster are addressed. Not only do these circumstances correspond directly to the concluding scenes of LMU, but they also describe suffering experienced by Conchobor directly parallel to his treatment of Deirdriu. These events are depicted within *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*, 'the wooing of Lúaine and the violent death of Athairne', in which Deirdriu's dubious legacy as the instrument with which Conchobor's suitability for kingship has been measured, is inherited by another young woman of comparable character, beauty and passivity.

2.4: Parallel Wives: Deirdriu and Lúaine in *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*

Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne [TLA] survives complete in three manuscripts, ranging from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century.¹³⁴ Edited by Whitley Stokes (1903), and Liam Breatnach (1980), an original date of composition in the second half of the twelfth century has been proposed, although approximately half the episodes within the tale suggest dependence upon earlier material (Breatnach 1980, 5–6). TLA describes the sorrow of Conchobor after Deirdriu's death, his search for a woman to replace her, and the misfortunes befalling the chosen girl following her arrival at his court. The tale's first episode assumes audience knowledge of Conchobor's previous relationship with Deirdriu, as well as, it would appear, the reasons for her current absence from his life, described by the final episode of LMU. It may be observed, initially, that several striking parallels are drawn between characters whose depiction within TLA appears to reflect their portrayal within LMU. It is proposed that, not only has the author of TLA composed his tale with conscious cross-reference to the earlier text,¹³⁵ but that his choice of the satirist Athairne as a member of its supporting cast is greatly significant. Ultimately, I suggest that TLA should be seen to constitute a 'necessary form of sequel to *Longes mac n-Uislenn*' (cf. Ó Briain 1979), as well as underlining the relationship between Conchobor's dubious governance

134 TCD H.2.16 [= YBL] cols. 880–885; RIA 23 P 12 [= Book of Ballymote] 141r46–142r13; TCD H.2.17 464b1–468a18. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from TLA are taken from Breatnach 1980 (readings from all three manuscripts); translations are mine, with kind assistance from Professor Gregory Toner.

135 Hull's assignment of the language of LMU to the Old Irish period (1949, 29–32; contra Herbert 1992, 53) suggests that its composition predates the composition of TLA by at least a century.

of Ulster, and the young women, Deirdriu and Lúaine, whose characterisation within both tales reveals its most significant defects.

The action of TLA begins as Conchobor is said to be 'in grief and sorrow and exceeding great dejection' (ll.1–2 *i cuma 7 toirrsi 7 i ndomenmain dermáir*), following Deirdriu's death, the circumstances of which are not otherwise alluded to, beyond the fact that Conchobor is held expressly responsible (l.2 *iar n-éc Derdrindi uad*, 'after Deirdriu's death by his [agency]'). The passage continues by stating that neither 'music, brightness, beauty or delight in the world' (ll.2–3 *ní... do chéol nó da thlús nó d'aíbníus nó d'airfided for domun*) will appease the king's dejection, a description heavily reminiscent of the manner in which Deirdriu is said to have mourned the demise of the *maic Uislenn* (LMU ll.204–06), during which time she will neither smile nor consume food and, finding no pleasure in the arts of Conchobor's musicians, composes extempore laments for the brothers' deaths. This scene provides the earliest indication of the author's suggested construction of TLA, in consequence of the events of LMU, effectively introducing the idea that Conchobor, the person ultimately responsible for Deirdriu's bereavement and for her eventual death – actions for which he receives no chastisement during LMU itself – deserves exposure to comparable anguish.

In the face of Conchobor's dejection, his lords suggest that he should seek out a woman, 'the daughter of a king or lord, who would drive away from him his lamentation for Deirdriu' (ll.5–6 *ingen rí g nó flatha do díchuirfed uad cuma Derdrindi*). He agrees to this suggestion, and messengers are brought, two women named Leborcham, who search the forts and towns of Ireland for a suitable girl. The fact that both women share the same name, and essentially the same function within the text, suggests some element of duplication, especially as the first messenger, Leborcham daughter of Áe and Adarc, also features briefly in *Serglige Con Culainn*, the tale of Cú Chulainn's wasting-sickness (Dillon 1953, ll.32–38). The women's practical function within TLA, however, as messengers and intermediaries between Conchobor and an as-yet unknown third party, is shared with that of the woman also named Leborcham found in LMU, herself responsible for supplying information about an unknown object of desire to another character. In LMU, it is Leborcham (patronymic unspecified), here a poet and satirist, who brings Noísiu's name, and the details of his personal appearance, to Deirdriu's attention (LMU ll.90–99). In TLA, Leborcham daughter of Áe and Adarc brings word to Conchobor of a girl she has seen upon her search, Lúaine daughter of Domanchenn mac Dega, whom she describes as 'the one girl in Ireland who possessed the ways of Deirdriu, in shape and sense and dexterity' (ll.129–30 *óenigen ro gab moda Derdrinni fuirri a nÉrinn eter cruth 7 chéll 7 lám da*). In both texts, the messengers' respective interventions result in an occurrence of *grád écmaise*, the 'sight-

unseen' desire of one party for an otherwise unknown person described to them. Accordingly, Deirdriu declares that she 'will not be well' until she has seen Noísiu in the flesh (LMU 1.99), whilst Conchobor, upon hearing the description of Lúaine provided by Leborcham, is unable to resist seeing her for himself (TLA ll.143–44).

At this point in TLA, once Conchobor's marriage to the girl has been officially arranged, the most obvious allusion to events within LMU intrudes upon the chronology so far adhered to. It is stated that, 'at this time came Manannán mac Athgno, king of Man and the Foreigners' Isles [= Hebrides], with a vast sea-fleet, to raid and ravage Ulster and take vengeance for the sons of Uisnech' (ll.148–50 *isan aimsir sin do dechaid Manannán mac Athgno, rí Manand 7 Insi Gall, mórloinges mórdbal d'innrad 7 d'argain Ulad do dígail mac nUisnich*). Manannán's role during this episode is introduced by the claim that children born to Deirdriu and Noísiu during their exile in Scotland (LMU ll.137–55) were fostered by him following the couple's return to Ulster. It would appear, moreover, that not so many years have passed since their deaths occurred, given that Manannán initially acts upon behalf of Noísiu's son, Gaíar, a boy presumably not yet of an age to act for himself. Upon his arrival at Emain, alongside Gaíar, Manannán's warriors prepare for battle, but the Ulstermen declare their dissatisfaction that Conchobor should meet with the son of Noísiu in this way, and a truce is arranged, in which the boy is granted a portion of land and the honour price of his father (TLA ll.179–80, 211–16). The foreigners depart from Ulster and are not heard of again.

Both Stokes (1903, 271), and O'Curry (1873, 373) considered the episode with Gaíar and Manannán to be an uncomfortable interpolation at this point in the text. Its presence, however, is perfectly consistent with suggestions made thus far regarding the author's general awareness of LMU, and his desire to develop and comment upon the conclusions of the earlier tale. Gaíar receives land from Conchobor formerly belonging to a warrior now said to be in exile alongside Fergus mac Róich (TLA ll.213–15). Following the description of Manannán's fleet, further information concerning the exploits of Noísiu and his brothers whilst in Scotland is outlined (ll.172–75). Whilst the material concerning Gaíar and Manannán testifies to the existence of traditions relating to Deirdriu, Noísiu, and the subsequent exploits of their offspring external to the plot of LMU, this is unsurprising, given that similarly extraneous material occurs, for instance, within the *Bansenchus* (Dobbs 1931, 471; cf. Ní Bhrolcháin forthcoming), and as a probable influence upon later texts, notably the account of Conchobor's relationship with the sons of Uisliu described by Keating within *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (Dinneen 1908, 190–96; cf. 4.1.3.10, below).

The arrangement of these three incidents suggests that the author of TLA intended his depiction of Lúaine to be set within the context of Deirdriu's portrayal within LMU. If one seeks to further this claim, however, it is quickly apparent that Lúaine's textual relationship to Deirdriu is not coterminous, but contrastive. Several observations support this view. Whilst both women are initially described in terms of their great beauty, the respective consequences of their good looks differ greatly. For Deirdriu, the fatal implications of her 'yellow hair', 'scarlet lips and pearly teeth' (LMU ll.32, 46–47 *bé fuilt buidi [...] biäit a béoil partuing-deirg imma déta némanda*) are immediately expounded, for the assembled court and also for the tale's audience, throughout Cathbad's prophecy that the girl will bring nothing but death and destruction upon Ulster (as 2.2.1, above). For Lúaine, on the other hand, the impact of her beauty is beneficial to herself and her family. We are told that the girl's father is pleased with the prospective match, but that his acceptance of the offer is conditional upon 'a proper bride-price' also being offered for his daughter (TLA ll.130–31 *fáemaid amal sin ar ceann tochra dingbála di*). His concern that the financial aspect of any marital union be arranged, in advance of his consent being granted, contrasts sharply with the hint of illegality pervading Conchobor's behaviour towards Deirdriu in the opening scene of LMU, when his future 'indeterminate conjugal union' (Buttimer 1994–5, 27) with the girl is forced upon all those involved, in defiance of his warriors' understandable fears for their safety (LMU ll.80–84). Deirdriu's father Feidlimid, present at the time of Cathbad's prophecy (LMU ll.2ff.), was presumably amongst those who called for her death. His wife, Deirdriu's unnamed mother, chastises herself for being unable to explain the unrest of the child that screams in her womb (ll.24–26 *ór nad-fil lem féin find-focla fris-mberad Feidlimid fursundud fiss*, 'since I myself have not wise words with reference to which Feidlimid might obtain the illumination of knowledge'), whereas Lúaine's mother, Bé-guba, is well-informed of the reason for her own daughter's subsequent misfortunes (TLA ll.244–56). The prophecy, proclaiming Deirdriu's future impact upon Ulster, forms the opening scene of LMU, but it is not until the conclusion of TLA that Bé-guba predicts imminent fatality in the wake of her daughter's death, claiming that "it is not [only] the death of one person that will result from yonder deed, for I and her father will [also] die of grief for her. That [her] death would carry us off was fated and promised according to the druid's prophecy" (TLA ll.246–47 *'ní bás óenduni bias don gnúm úd uair fo-géb-sa 7 a hathair bás dia cumaid. Ro baí i ndán 7 i tairngiri in aided úd diar mbreith do réir fáistine in druad'*).

It is through the nature of their respective relationships with Conchobor that we may explore the most significant parallels between the characterisations of Lúaine and Deirdriu. I suggest that the sequence of events described throughout TLA should be read as a form of commentary upon Conchobor's behaviour within LMU, most especially with regard to those elements of his relationship with Deirdriu and the *maic Uislenn* within that text, which appear to constitute an

abuse of *fír flaithiusa*. TLA commences, as we have seen, with a description of Conchobor's state of mind in the period following Deirdriu's death for which he is unequivocally blamed by the tale's author. During Gaíar's and Manannán's visit to Ulster, moreover, a sense of unease amongst Conchobor's warriors, similar to their displeasure within LMU regarding his decision to raise Deirdriu for himself, is conveyed by their statement that it would be inappropriate for Conchobor to join battle against the son of Noísiu (TLA ll.179–80). Their caution suggests that, not only do they hope to protect Conchobor from the potential consequences of committing yet another unjust act, but that they hope to protect themselves against repercussions of similar severity to those inflicted by Fergus upon the entire Ulster court, in revenge for the deaths of the sons of Uisliu (LMU ll.191–203).

Although it might appear, therefore, as if Conchobor has appeased Gaíar, and made satisfactory recompense for Noísiu's death, TLA does not then culminate in the joyful celebration of his marriage to Lúaine, with the suggestion that the couple will live happily ever after. Instead, as Lúaine awaits her wedding, she is approached by Athairne Álgasach (the 'urgent' or 'importunate'), and his two sons, who have heard of her impending marriage and have come, they claim, in order to petition her for gifts (TLA ll.218–20). It is possible, though perhaps less likely in light of what follows, that Athairne, established elsewhere within the Ulster Cycle (e.g. in *Talland Étaí*) as resident poet at Conchobor's court, initially intended to seek an ordinary extension of patronage from his lord's prospective wife. Upon beholding the girl, however, he and his sons are 'filled with desire', claiming that 'they preferred not to be alive unless they could have intercourse with her' (TLA ll.221–22 *conár fear do dóib beth a mbethaid mani chomraicdis fria*). Lúaine, unimpressed, is beseeched by the men with increasingly desperate pleas to change her mind, before she is threatened with the invocation of a *glám dicinn*, the very worst form of satire (Kelly 1988, 44 n.44; Breatnach 1987, 140), unless she will consent to intercourse with all three men forthwith. Their conversation continues thus:

“Ní cubaid daib-si sin da rád”, ar [Lúaine], “7 mé do mnaí ic Conchobor.” “Ní fétmáid-ne beth bío”, for siad, “mani comraicem frit-su.” Opais an ingen a comlebaid. Do-niad-son didiu trí háera di-si coro fácaibsit trí bolga fora gruaidib .i. on 7 ainim 7 aithis .i. dub 7 derg 7 bán. Ad-bath didiu in ingen do féli 7 do náiri iar tain.

“Inappropriate it is for you to say that”, said [Lúaine], “while I am to be married to Conchobor”. “We cannot remain alive”, they say, “unless we sleep with you”. The damsel refused to lie with them. So then they make three satires upon her, which left three blisters upon her cheeks: shame and blemish and disgrace, black and white and red. Thereafter, the damsel died of modesty and shame’ (TLA ll.225–29).

Three further parallels between TLA and LMU are apparent here. The colours of the satire imposed upon Lúaine, ultimately fatal to her, constitute a negative reflection of the same colours

displayed by Noísiu, which render him so alluring to Deirdriu at their first encounter (LMU II.94–99).¹³⁶ Deirdriu's death, as a consequence of this liaison, occurs only later, and the initial reference to Noísiu's beauty does not automatically betoken disaster (as 2.2.3, above), given that, whilst Conchobor's jealousy of their association will prove instrumental in facilitating their respective departure, return to Ulster and demise, allusion to the ultimate fatality of the association is absent from Cathbad's prophecy. Secondly, Deirdriu's attachment to Noísiu constitutes an act of infidelity to her established connection with Conchobor – no matter what the circumstances of its inception – whereas Lúaine is satirised, and shamed to death, as a result of perfect faithfulness to her future husband, and her fierce defence of even their affianced state against the entreaties of Athairne and his sons.¹³⁷ Thirdly, Lúaine's refusal to eschew her legitimate connection to Conchobor, in defiance of the entreaties of three men, Athairne and his sons, contrasts Deirdriu's willingness to reject the prospect of future concubinage by departing Ulster alongside the three sons of Uisliu (LMU II.162–65).¹³⁸

The presence of Athairne Álgasach within TLA, furthermore, cannot be considered insignificant. The poet also features, most notably, in *Talland Étair*, the account of the siege of Howth (Ó Dónaill 2005), and in several tracts concerning the nature of poetry and satire.¹³⁹ His reputation is, to say the least, unsavoury. In the opening scene of *Talland Étair* he is introduced as 'a cruel unmerciful man, Athairne the Urgent, a man who would demand the only eye from a one-eyed man, and [proposition] a woman [even] as she was giving birth' (1.2 *fer gáde a óensúil din cháech 7 gáid in mnai oca lámnad*).¹⁴⁰ It is unsurprising, therefore, that the following line of the text describes how Athairne began a circuit around Ireland 'upon Conchobor's advice' (1.4 *dia lluid for cúairt a comairli Chonchobair*)! Caoimhín Ó Dónaill has noted that Conchobor is generous towards the poet, in granting a mandate for him to travel about the country (2005, 11), yet his generosity also has the almost certainly pleasing effect of removing Athairne from the vicinity of Emain Macha, perhaps in the hope that he will trouble someone else with his importunate demands instead. The satire made by Athairne in TLA, like his demands throughout *Talland Étair*, admits none of the extenuating circumstances in which such an act may sometimes be

136 Other examples of blemishes arising from satires imposed describe red, white and blue stripes (e.g. the 'Guaire' episode from *Sanas Cormaic*; Russell 2008, 35; cf. Meroney 1949/50, 223/26), and it is possible that the colours of Lúaine's blemishes were stated with such specificity to echo the description of Noísiu in LMU.

137 Her steadfastness is praised by Conchobor in his lament for Lúaine at the close of tale, in a series of verses which echo the nostalgia and futility of Deirdriu's own laments for the *maic Uislenn* within LMU (TLA II.333–52; LMU II.208–63, 267–306).

138 I am grateful to Matthew Lennox for this observation.

139 A fragmentary text 'on the privileges and responsibilities of poets', in TCD H.2.15 (Gwynn 1942); the 'Greth' episode in *Sanas Cormaic* (Russell 2008, 35–36); and *Aigidecht Athairne*, 'The Guesting of Athairne' (Meyer 1914; Thurneysen 1914; Lubotsky 1982; from TCD H.2.18 [= Book of Leinster] 118a8–118b3; BM Harleian 5280 fols. 77b–78). The latter tale is preceded in H.2.18 by an untitled extract, beginning *Aithirni algessach ma Fercertni is e is dibiqhu rouui i nÉri*, introducing the poetic contest, between Athairne and his foster-son Amairgen, played out during the *Aigidecht* proper.

140 All quotations from *Talland Étair* derive from Ó Dónaill's edition, unless otherwise stated.

performed (cf. Kelly 1988, 138). Rather, the three satires uttered constitute a hasty response to Lúaine's refusal to sleep with Athairne and his sons in spite of her prior engagement. Given that their imposition does not appear to result from any previous encounter between the poet and the girl, the satires may, therefore, be regarded as entirely unjust. Their severity, however, results in the appearance of three coloured blisters upon Lúaine's cheek, despite the fact that, as Kim McCone notes, only 'a justified satire or false judgement [is] supposed to have [such] dire physical effect' (1990, 124). If the satire is unjustified, why then do the blisters appear? One possible interpretation of this episode follows, from the argument advanced above, that Lúaine's role within the text is of foremost importance with regard to her status as Conchobor's affianced wife, Deirdriu's replacement, and that her portrayal within TLA mirrors Deirdriu's depiction within LMU. Both women, initially possessed by Conchobor, are lost to him. This loss is facilitated, on the one hand, by Deirdriu's faithlessness but, on the other, by Lúaine's fidelity. Lúaine's death, as a result of Athairne's satire, and her status as Conchobor's affianced wife, suggest that her depiction throughout TLA may be regarded as a form of commentary upon Conchobor's wrong-doing within LMU, foremost of which is his treatment of Deirdriu. That Conchobor himself fails to realise this, is suggested by the fact that he counsels the Ulstermen to kill Athairne for the 'evil' (TLA l.350 *olc*) he has committed, a fitting response only in a case where the satire in question had been unjust (Kelly 1988, 138 n.103; Gwynn 1942, 48 l.29).¹⁴¹

If the text of LMU is read as an exemplum for the proper exercise of kingship and *fír flathemon*, it is apparent that Conchobor fails to live up to the demands of his role. What may be surprising in light of this, is the fact that, within LMU itself, he is subject to no obvious reprisals or censure resulting from his behaviour (as 2.3, above). No satire results from his misjudgements, and although Deirdriu's final lament for the death of Noísiu denounces Conchobor for carrying off 'that which was most beautiful and dear to her upon the earth' (LMU ll.271–73 *ní rop áilliú lim fo nim, ocus ní rop inmainib ro-uais uaim*), her words carry no obvious satirical power in themselves (contra Gabriel 1995, 82–83). Leborcham, meanwhile, whose profession renders Conchobor expressly unable to deprive her of access to the adolescent Deirdriu, remains silent upon the subject of his misdeeds. It may be that her reticence, when she might have spoken out justly, provides a further contrast to Athairne's unprovoked assault. Leborcham herself, furthermore, experiences no adverse effects for her part in Deirdriu's death, and the subsequent destruction of Emain, even though her initial conversation with Deirdriu precipitates the girl's departure from Conchobor's custody. In TLA, moreover, whilst Leborcham's words are responsible for bringing Lúaine to Conchobor's attention, it is Athairne's words that will take her

141 Cathbad's words of caution against destroying the poet (TLA ll.275–79), offer the only indication within the text itself that doubt may exist regarding the legitimacy of Conchobor's revenge-taking (also constituting a further example of Cathbad's advisory role; cf. 2.3, above).

away. As a result of Lúaine's death, in contrast, Athairne and his children are burned to death by the Ulstermen (TLA ll.353–57), as Conchobor grieves for the lost girl in a reprise of his mental and emotional state at the beginning of the tale.

It is clear from the analysis of these texts that the relationship between TLA and LMU is more complex than has hitherto been realised. Several significant instances of what appears to be deliberate parallelism may be identified, comprising an intricate manipulation of the roles of two contrasting women, two satirists, and two trios of persons who interfere, fatally, with an established relationship between each woman and Conchobor himself, arguably the central character within LMU and TLA, and the person upon whom both Deirdriu's and Lúaine's characterisation depends. It remains to suggest that the composition of TLA in this fashion indicates the conviction of its author that Conchobor's abuses of *fír* within LMU should be addressed, and that this task was facilitated by his depiction of Conchobor's relationship with another woman, and another series of circumstances, which comprise a remarkable parallel to events within LMU.

Chapter Four

Deirdriu in the later tradition

Synopsis

This chapter will outline: editions of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*, and their respective editors' editorial policies; a description of the Glenmasan manuscript and RIA B iv 1, the earliest witnesses to *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*; a new editorial approach to *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*; the episodes of the text; analysis of each consecutive episode, complete with commentary; the relationship of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* to Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa Ar Éirinn*; a summary of the composition of the text, and of the characterisation of Deirdriu

1: Re-Statement of intent for chapter

This chapter will proceed from the conclusions outlined in 3, above, concerning the presentation of Deirdriu's character within the earlier tradition (e.g. LMU, TLA, and etcetera). It will address the treatment of the series of events described within LMU as its narrative develops into the later medieval period. The difficulties of establishing an authoritative text of a later version, to which the events and characters described by LMU may be compared, will be outlined, expanding upon the suggestion of Mac Giolla Léith (1993, 12–19; cf. Mac Giolla Léith 1994) that the material currently referred to as *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* [OCU] “is not a later revision of [LMU] but a separate tale concerning the same characters and some of the same events but with significant differences in detail” (contra Hull 1949, 1–3, and passim). It will be concluded, following an outline of the complex manuscript tradition of the later material, that a direct comparison is both impossible and undesirable (as 1.2.1, below). The earliest extant witness to 'OCU' in any form, i.e. the Glenmasan manuscript, in addition to the earliest witness in which a complete text is found, i.e. RIA B iv 1, will also be assessed. Several editions of OCU (e.g. Stokes 1887; Mac Giolla Léith 1993) will be considered, with regard to the editorial principles by which each has been assembled, and their respective accuracy and usefulness for the present study explored. It will be proposed, ultimately, that the interpretation of the later strand of material concerning events at Conchobor's court, following the departure and return of the sons of Uisnech to Ulster,¹⁴² has, with two notable exceptions, been impeded by imprecise presentation of this material in its manuscript context. It will also be proposed that the characterisation of Deirdriu – more commonly referred to as 'Deirdre' during this period – has

142 The development of the patronymic of Noísiu, Ainnle and Ardán, from 'Uisliu' to 'Uisneach', is considered by Hull (1949, 4–7), and Mac Giolla Léith (1993, 142–43). Throughout the following discussion, the three brothers will be referred to as the *maic Uisnig*, the form employed by Mackinnon (e.g. 1904–5), whose edition of OCU forms the basis of the text for subsequent analysis, in accordance with the reasons outlined below, 1.2.1.

undergone considerable alteration from her depiction within LMU, and within the earlier tradition as a whole as it has been defined (as **3**, above, esp. 2.3).

1.1: Manuscripts and editions of *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* for subsequent analysis

As noted at **1** 4.2, above, there has been little critical discussion of the construction of the later narrative strand of events concerning Conchobor, Deirdre and the *maic Uisnig*, besides brief assessments of uncontextualised episodes by Philip O'Leary (1987) and David Gabriel (1995). O'Leary refers to Stokes's 1887 edition, whilst Gabriel, most likely due to the proximity of its publication date, cites the 1993 edition of OCU by Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith. Neither scholar, however, explores the descent of the later tradition from events described by LMU, nor the textual integrity of the version of OCU established by Mac Giolla Léith, in spite of contemporary objections to several aspects of his edition (Breatnach 1994–5; cf. Ó Flaithearta 1995; Edel 1996; as 1.2, below). There are, in fact, serious questions to be raised concerning both the 1993 text's principles of construction, and the manner in which it discusses the Glenmasan manuscript, the earliest extant witness to OCU.

Prior to a more detailed exploration of the shortcomings of Mac Giolla Léith's edition, and its rejection as a suitable basis for further textual analysis, the Glenmasan manuscript itself, and the version of OCU it contains, will be described at greater depth (previous critical descriptions of the manuscript are noted at **1** 3.1, above).

1.1.1: The Glenmasan Manuscript: condition and pagination

The importance of the Glenmasan manuscript [G] to any analysis of the later tradition of material concerning Deirdre and the *maic Uisnig* cannot be overstated, given that it pre-dates the next-earliest extant version by approximately 150 years. G was probably composed in the late fifteenth century (Black 1987, s.v. Adv. 72.2.3), whilst RIA B iv 1, the next-earliest extant and earliest complete copy, dates from 1671 (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 30). The state of preservation of G is, however, unfortunate. Due to the disparity of previous commentators' imposed pagination (see below), and their disagreement as to the likely date of G's composition, it is clear that the interpretation of its contents has been impaired by its poor condition.

The point at which the manuscript began to deteriorate is unclear. No description of its condition at the time of its acquisition by the Advocates' Library, sometime prior to 1801, appears to be

extant.¹⁴³ Donald Smith's description, recorded during the collation of material for the report of the Highland Society into the authenticity of Macpherson's *Works of Ossian* in 1805, suggests that the manuscript was by this time considerably mangled. With reference to the inscription from which G takes its name (as 1 3.1, above), he notes that "the date being so particular, [it] must be thought to have been taken from the manuscript itself when it was more entire than it is now, for it is greatly mutilated" (1805, 297). The precise nature of the mutilation is, sadly, unspecified. Lord Bannatyne, in a letter to the committee's convener Henry Mackenzie, printed in the same report, describes the general condition of the Kilbride Collection, of which G was probably once part, with regard to the privations each item appeared to him to have suffered between the years of their composition and their examination by the Committee: "the state in which [the collection] was found, exhibits a striking proof of the destruction to which such papers were exposed from the carelessness of their owners" (id., 284). Theophilus O'Flanagan's compilation of successive descriptions of Deirdriu's relationship with the *maic Uisnig*, made in 1808, may also depend upon the text of G (as 1 2.3, above), yet it is notable that, were this the case, O'Flanagan makes no mention of damage to his source, or to episodes within the narrative lacking from its text. It is possible that the version of OCU made use of by O'Flanagan was taken from another manuscript in the Highland Society's archive (e.g. one of those later observed by Ewan Maclachlan), but it may also have been the case that, at the time at which O'Flanagan examined it, G's contents were intact, and only the physical condition of its pages demonstrated the neglect referred to by Smith and Lord Bannatyne, echoed four years later by Maclachlan in his *Analysis of the Contents of the Celtic Manuscripts belonging to the Honourable Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland* (1812). Several folios of G are described, in 1812, as "rudely patched together, and much injured by improper management" (Adv. Lib. 72.3.4, 81), probably a reference to the unlayered folios later noted by Mackinnon and Black (see below), whose misfolding disrupts the continuous flow of text between the [current] third and fifth pages of OCU (as figure 1, below). It is curious, however, that Maclachlan, a Gaelic-speaker almost certainly capable of reading G, in addition to copying its contents, follows O'Flanagan in making no mention of missing sections of text, as opposed to deficiencies in its assembly or preservation. The imperfect condition of G was also noted by Alexander MacBain and John Kennedy, when editing the unpublished transcription of G's contents made by Alexander Cameron sometime prior to 1894 (see Cameron 1894, 421), but their description provides no greater specificity regarding the nature of the damage. The first commentator to describe the condition of G in minute detail is Ronald Black (1987, s.v. Adv. 72.2.3). His examination concentrates upon the

143 1801 is a provisional date, given that G is not found within a list of 22 manuscripts held at that time in the Kilbride Collection, compiled by Donald Mackintosh; Adv. Lib. 73.2.24, 15. Mackinnon (1904–5, 5), referring to an appendix of the Highland Society's final report on Ossian's authenticity, notes that G was given to Lord Bannatyne by the minister of Glendaruel, Rev. John Mackinnon, upon whose testimony the belief that it had formerly belonged to the Kilbride Collection depends.

state of the manuscript's preservation, as well as the dislocation of its original order. Neither Smith, Lord Bannatyne, O'Flanagan nor Maclachlan note existing pagination visible in G at the time of their respective examinations, although the annotations 'this should be leaf five' and 'this should be leaf three' appear at the foot of [current] pages 5 and 7 respectively, probably in the hand of Ewan Maclachlan. Maclachlan may have been the one who paginated the entire manuscript as it now stands, although it is curious, were this the case, that his enumeration fails to reflect the disruption caused to the text by the absent and displaced leaves. Whitley Stokes, the next scholar whose observations concerning G are extant, is another possible candidate, although his knowledge of Gaelic and his reflections upon the inchoate nature of OCU casts doubt upon the ascription.¹⁴⁴ It is more probable that G was paginated by someone unaware of the interruption to the text of OCU, although the point at which this occurred is unclear (the numbering of the columns, though not the pages, is mentioned by Mackinnon [1904–5, 7]).

The pagination of G takes little account of the actual divisions of the text. John Mackechnie notes that “the columns are numbered 1–101, but although some f[olios] are misplaced, this numbering runs on consecutively, paying no attention to these misplacements or lost folios” (1973, 214). The pages are also numbered consecutively, in pencil on the outermost margin of each leaf, from '1' [cols. 1 and 2], on the recto of the first leaf that does not also form the front cover, to '51' [cols. 101 and 102]¹⁴⁵ on the recto of the back cover (the conjunct folio of page 37 [cols. 73 and 74]). The complicated nature of G's physical composition is not reflected in Stokes's observation that the manuscript has twenty seven leaves written in double columns, although he does note that mis-folding of the second bifolium, i.e. what ought to have been pages 3, 4, 9 and 10, but are currently numbered as 3, 4, 5 and 6, causes the first sections of OCU to be interrupted by a “portion of the Cattlespoil of Flidais”, before OCU “is resumed on the recto of the fourth leaf, and breaks off on the verso of the same leaf” (1887, 109). Ronald Black, from his more recent examination of G, calculates that the absence of an obvious conclusion to the narrative of OCU has resulted from the loss of an entire bifolium of text. He deems G to consist of “three gatherings (pp. i–14, 15–34, 37–52), and a single folio, pp. 35–6, whose conjunct has been excised without textual loss”. The missing bifolium is absent from between the central pages of the first gathering, i.e. between pages 8 and 9 according to G's current pagination. The two bifolia adjacent to the textual lacuna, Black continues, “have been bound in unlayered, thus disturbing the order of the surrounding text” (1987 s.v. Adv. 72.2.3; see figure 1, below).

Black's observations reaffirm the conclusions of Mackinnon (1904–5, 3–8), whose description

¹⁴⁴ Stokes did, however, sign his name to the foot of the second column.

¹⁴⁵ Contrary to Mackechnie's observation in 1973, a very faint '102' may be still discerned above the final column (as of August 2008).

implied that the 'unlayered' leaf – the third, which ought to have been the fifth – as well as the more substantial textual lacuna, had resulted from the loss of a single bifolium, though he stopped short of stating this to be the case. The absence of this bifolium has led, gradually, to the supposition that the copy of OCU contained in G is incomplete, and that, furthermore, the copy of *Táin Bó Flidais* which recommences after the lacuna also lacks its opening paragraphs (e.g. Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 30). Mackinnon's opinion regarding the division of content in G, however, is obscured by the structure of his edition, as it was printed in *The Celtic Review*, in which the text of each segment from the manuscript has been divided into sections interspersed with other articles within each volume (the 1904–5 instalment alone occupies pages 3–17, 102–31, 208–229 and 296–315). The internal divisions of the manuscript are indicated only in marginal notation. It is clear, however, from Mackinnon's later description of G in his *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts* (1912), that he was of the opinion that its contents should be seen to constitute a single consecutive tale, rather than two separate ones ('OCU' and 'TBF'), as subsequent editors have tended to assume. He concludes that (1912, 159):

“the subject, which occupies the whole of [G], is connected with the Tale of the Sons of Uisneach and Deirdre, but is by no means confined to that Tragedy. With the exception of the gap above mentioned [i.e. the lacuna caused by the loss of the central bifolium], the text here is continuous. The large and elaborate capital at the beginning indicates the commencement of the Tale, while the usual docquet Finit shows its conclusion [i.e. after the colophon of TBF]”.

Mackinnon does not note that the textual lacuna between the end of [current] column 8 (*Is fír ón...*) and the beginning of column 13 (...*Secht muca marbta*) deprives us of the juncture between the section of narrative prior to the deaths of the *maic Uisnig*, and the following episode which precipitates Fergus' eventual departure from Ulster. Some form of the brothers' death-scene must have occurred, in order to allow for the taunts later cast at Fergus by Bricriu that their death at Conchobor's behest was in violation of his surety (Mackinnon 1904–5, 212). Within the extant text, however, there are several points at which the OCU-tale shows distinct junctures, as noted in Mackechnie's description of the manuscript (1973, 214). Mackechnie divided the contents of G into five distinct parts, as follows:¹⁴⁶

- fol. 2a–6a1, 14 i.e. cols. i–8 + 13–16 + 17, line 14 = *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*. Begins *Docomoradh fled morchain moradbal*; ending [of this part] absent due to “loss of f[olios] after fol. 5b”
- fol. 6a1, 15–7a1, 5 i.e. cols. 17, line 15–20 + 9–12 + 21, 5 = *Fochunn Loingsi Fergusa*, “a continuation of the proceeding” [sic], i.e. of OCU. Begins *Imthusa Fergusa imorro do gabsad en co feitmech*, ends *7 fa mor an doluidh do Meidb enach Fergusa do fregra na gach*

¹⁴⁶ All pagination follows Mackechnie 1973.

ni dib sin, uair gach ni do geallaidh Fergus as i Medb uile do icad ara shon.

- fol. 7a1, 6–23b1 [no cols. given] = *Táin Bó Flidais*, “a continuation of the proceeding” [sic]. Begins *Aon d'oidche da ndernad fled mor-chain ag Oilill 7 ag Meidb*; ends *A haithle na laidhe sin do coirged cend Oilella Find 7 do cuir Flidais filid 7 eicis da hadlucad go hairm a raibe corp Oilella Find 7 do claidhedh fert forra an ein inad ann sin.*
- fol. 23b1, 24–27a1, 15 i.e. cols. 87, line 25–101, line 15 = “Toraigeacht [sic] Tana Bo Flidaise ann so [...] a continuation of the proceeding [sic] but here with a separate heading”. Begins *Cid tra acht do toglad agus do hairged Dun Oilella Find*; ends *Gurab hi Tain Bo Flidaise cona Toruigheacht go ruici sin.*
- fol. 27a1, 16 [ff.] = “illegible”.

Caoimhín Breatnach (1994, 109) notes that Mackechnie, following Mackinnon, “took [G] to contain one continuous narrative”, divided within the manuscript into five distinct episodes. Breatnach points out that the concluding formula of OCU in its next earliest extant manuscript, RIA B iv 1 (*conadh í oidhe 7 feall Cloinni hUisneach go nuige sin*), which “would presumably have been found in the Glenmasan manuscript” as well, does not necessarily imply that the conclusion of this section of the narrative in G was also viewed as the end of the tale. In the earlier manuscript tradition, he continues, “such a formula could also be used to denote the end of different sections of a particular narrative” (id., 111). Several such formulae are found in the narrative resumed in G following the absent bifolium, including *Imthúsa sidha co n-uigi sin*, and *Sgela Fergus co n-uig sin* (ibid.), in addition to the formulae noted by Mackechnie (as above). Breatnach concludes that the occurrence of such formulae:

“does not denote the end of different tales. In each case different sections of the same narrative are denoted. One cannot be certain, therefore, whether the formula at the end of OCU cited above [*conadh í oidhe 7 feall Cloinni hUisneach go nuige sin*, from RIA B iv 1] was originally intended to denote the end of a particular tale or the end of a particular section of a longer narrative” (id., 111).

The most recent examination of G by Ronald Black (1987, s.v. Adv. 72.2.3), led him to conclude that the textual break in the midst of its OCU-text had been caused by loss of the central bifolium of the first gathering, otherwise comprised of four folios, the second bound in “unlayered”. A detailed observation of G by the present writer, made in August 2008, confirms Black's description, but for the fact that the final page of what he seems to have taken as the fourth folio of the first gathering, does not appear to be attached to a conjunct leaf, unless it has been secured, imperceptibly, between the manuscript's front cover and the conjunct half of page 51 (to which the small strip that remains of the conjunct leaf of the front cover itself is attached). I suggest that Black's description of the pagination of the three gatherings of G should be emended as follows (pagination as current within G):

- Gathering 1: Three folios and a single sheet (pp. 13r., 14v.), OR four folios, the outer one of which comprises a small strip attached between the front cover and p.51, and (single sheet) pp. 13r. and 14v. (In either case, there would not appear to have been further textual loss or disruption). On the verso of the first leaf (unpaginated) occurs the inscription beginning *Gleannmasain an Cuige la deug don...Mi*, from which the manuscript takes its most common name (cf. 1 3.1, above).

= Columns 1 (p.1r.) – 28 (p.14v.) [cols. 25, 26, 27 and 28 on pp.13r. and 14v., the single sheet/ conjunct of piece attached to front cover and p.51];

- Gathering 2: Five folios

= Columns 29 (p.15r.) – 68 (p.34v.);

- Bound in between the second and third gatherings is a single sheet, “whose conjunct has been excised without textual loss” (Black 1987, in Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 30), comprising pp. 35 r. and 36 v. (columns 69, 70, 71 and 72);

- Gathering 3: Four folios

= Columns 73 (p.37r.) – 100 (50v.) The conjunct half of the outer folio (pp. 37r. and 38v.) forms the back cover of the manuscript, on the recto of which is the final column of the text of *Táin Bó Flidais* (concluding *gurb hi Tain Bó Flidais cona Toruigheacht go ruici sin. Finit. Amen*), and a second column in a different hand, now significantly faded [i.e. Mackechnie's section.5, described as “illegible”]. '101' is written above the first column, and '102' – barely visible – above the second. The verso, forming the back cover of the manuscript, is blank.

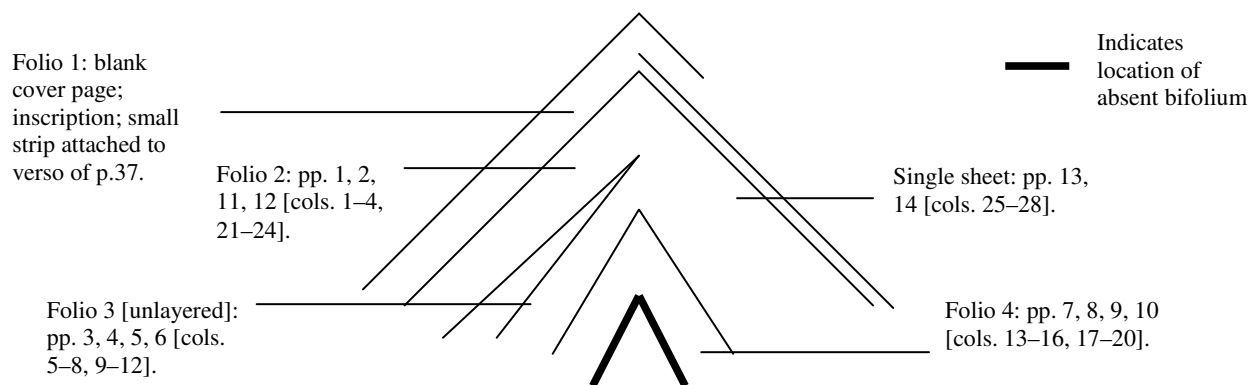


Figure 1: the unlayered and absent bifolia of G (first gathering; pagination as seen)

The current pagination visible throughout G does not reflect the consecutive narrative progression of the OCU-text. Had the third folio been correctly bound in, the consecutive order of the first gathering, maintaining current pagination, would run as follows: front cover; Glenmasan inscription; pp. 1 [cols. 1, 2]; 2 [cols. 3, 4]; 3 [cols. 5, 6]; 4 [cols. 7, 8]; 7 [cols. 13, 14]; 8 [cols. 15, 16]; [absent bifolium = 4 pp., 8 cols.]; 9 [cols. 17, 18]; 10 [cols. 19, 20]; 5 [cols. 9, 10]; 6 [cols. 11, 12]; 11 [cols. 21, 22]; 12 [cols. 23, 24]; 13 [cols. 25, 25]; 14 [cols. 27, 28]; strip attached to verso of p. 37. The lacuna caused by the loss of the central bifolium occurs between the end of [current] p.8 and the beginning of p. 9, i.e. between columns 16 and 17. The loss of this bifolium is equal to the absence from the narrative of four pages, or eight columns' worth, of text. Given the consistent number of lines-per-column throughout the rest of the manuscript, the absent leaves signify the loss of between 152 and 156 lines of text – roughly 6 printed pages from the OCU-tale represented by both Mackinnon's and Mac Giolla Léith's modern editions. The stage at which the bifolium became detached from the rest of the manuscript is unclear. None of the descriptions of G by Dr. Smith, Lord Bannatyne, O'Flanagan and Maclachlan make specific reference to an absent leaf, although damage of such a kind to the manuscript could have been encompassed by, for example, Smith's pronouncement upon its “greatly mutilated” state (1805, 297). Had the leaf been misplaced between the acquisition of G by the Advocates' Library, and its transferral to the care of the Highland Society, or, indeed, between the dates of the description of G by Smith and that of Ewan Maclachlan in 1812, one would anticipate that so significant an alteration as the loss or removal of an entire bifolium would not have gone unnoticed (Maclachlan [Adv. Lib 72.3.4, 81] states that G contains 25 leaves, rather than the 26 noted by Stokes in 1887, but this is perhaps due to his exclusion of the conjunct leaf forming the front cover, containing no actual text). It would therefore appear that loss of the bifolium occurred prior to 1805, either when the manuscript was still housed in the Kilbride Collection, or during its traffic between various owners in the earlier half of the eighteenth century (cf. Black 1987, s.v. Adv. 72.2.3).

1.2: Editorial treatment of the 'lost ending'

Respective editors of OCU have dealt with the textual lacuna in a variety of ways, with varying degrees of success.

Whilst not technically an edition, the text within Ewan Maclachlan's *Analysis* (1812) consists of the fragmented testimony of G spliced together with passages supplied from the OCU-tale in Adv. Lib. 72.2.6 ('No. III Patrick Turner'). Maclachlan's decision appears to have been based

upon the conveniently proximate location of the manuscripts.¹⁴⁷ 72.2.6 was probably compiled in the early eighteenth century, and is the same manuscript from which Whitley Stokes supplies a conclusion to G's OCU-text (1887, 142–52, 169–78; as 1 3.3, above), although Stokes, unlike Maclachlan, maintains the manuscript's orthography, and does not import an Ossianic rendering of the names of Deirdre, Noísiu and his brothers. 72.2.6 displays Keating's influence in its opening episode, and also in the manner of Deirdre's death, which Maclachlan renders as “[Darthula's] anguish] drew a sentiment from Conchubar [sic] which so shocked her feelings that she sprung out of the carriage, and causally meeting with a pillar of stone her brains flew out, so that she instantly breathed her last” (72.3.4, 66–7). Stokes also appends Keating's epilogue, in addition to the information, from the earlier body of the text, that Deirdre jumped down into the grave of the *maic Uisnig* once they had been laid therein, without noting the subsequent discrepancy this constitutes to the overall narrative. He offers no further hint to the reader regarding his editorial policy, beyond the tacit information that the lacuna in G made it necessary for an ending for the tale to be supplied (1887, 109).

Donald Mackinnon's edition of the entirety of G (1904–8) allows his editorial reaction towards its textual lacuna to be analysed. The occurrence of the lacuna is duly noted in the relevant place, i.e. at the top of [current] column 17, during the poem beginning '*secht muca marbta*' (1904–5, 209). Mackinnon notes only that “the return of the [*maic Uisnig* to Ireland], their separation from Fergus through the intrigues of the king, the murder of the heroes and the death of the lady constitute the chief incidents of the Tale [although] our MS. breaks off abruptly with the slaying of Illann the Fair, son of Fergus, by Conall Cernach, but the conclusion of the saga is well known from older and later versions” (id., 8). It is clear, however, from Mackinnon's later description of G (1912, 159), that he came to hold the opinion that its contents should be seen to constitute a single consecutive tale (as 1.1.1, above).

Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith explicitly states his intention to provide a “critical edition” of OCU (1993, 9). He is acutely conscious of the absent bifolium and the subsequent loss of text, and assumes that the missing pages have removed the end of OCU, as well as the beginning of *Táin Bó Flidais* (e.g. 1993, 30: “[TBF] is acephalous”). Three possible solutions for addressing the textual deficit are outlined:

- “to base the edition [of OCU] on [G] and supply the ending of the tale from a later MS or MSS”;
- “to base it on the earliest complete text, i.e. [RIA B iv 1], written in 1671”;

147 ‘No. III Patrick Turner’ was presented to the Highland Society in 1809.

- “to choose a text that accurately reflects the most 'popular' or 'typical' version of OCU in the MS tradition” (1993, 55).

In the furtherance of attempting to produce a definitive text, Mac Giolla Léith considers each of these options, and concludes that the most significant point of departure is the divergence of content between the manuscripts other than G, which contain a version of OCU. These manuscripts are classified into Groups A–F, depending upon their characteristics (id., 51–54). Based upon his assumptions of what the 'lost ending' of OCU within G ought to have contained, these characteristics are defined as the “inclusion or exclusion of the following” (id., 55–56):

1. The prologue from Keating's 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach',¹⁴⁸ describing the circumstances of Deirdre's birth, meeting with Noísiu and departure from Ulster;
2. Keating's ending and epilogue, describing the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* and of Deirdre through her leap from the chariot (Mac Giolla Léith assumes [id., 57] that this series of events constitutes the most likely conclusion to the narrative within G, given that it is “the only alternative” to later descriptions involving Maine Lámhgharbh;
3. The various verse passages with which the prose text is interspersed;
4. Certain quatrains, classified as “rare” (id., 59, 170), within the poem beginning *Fada an lá gan clann Uisneach*;
5. The description of Maine's death at the hands of Cú Chulainn, for his part in effecting the demise of the *maic Uisnig*.

Based upon these criteria, Mac Giolla Léith selects the manuscript Maynooth M 103 [= number 18 from his classification; id., 34] as the most representative account of the material absent from G – i.e. of the purported ending of OCU. The choice of this manuscript, and the principles with which his overall treatment of OCU's variant versions has been approached, is outlined as follows:

“It appears, therefore, that our first editorial option, that which favours the evidence of the earliest MS extant, is most attractive. Consequently, I propose to use the Glenmasan MS as the basis for this edition, as Stokes (1887) did, but to supply the missing later part of the tale from different sources. In broad outline the three MSS of the D group [1993, 53] are the only MSS which reflect the reconstructed ending of [G] argued for above [in §§ 4.1.1 through 4.1.7, e.g. the five criteria outlined above]: all of the poems are included (but not the additional quatrains in poem (vii)), as is the account of Maine's death, and the ending of the tale shows no trace of [Keating's] influence. Unfortunately there are many instances in which both the prose and verse passages in this group are corrupt and disagree with the majority of the other MSS, especially those of the C and E groups, which in most cases provide the better readings. As the MSS of the E group, but not the C group, also include all of

148 Note that this title was imposed by Osborn Bergin in his *Sgéalaigheacht Chéitinn* (1930); due to the continuous nature of Keating's text itself, the episode describing Deirdriu's relationship with the *maic Uisnig* and Conchobor is defined primarily by its colophon (cf. 1.3.10, below).

the poems, and *retain the original ending of the tale*, and are both more linguistically conservative and more representative of the MS tradition of OCU as a whole, the later part of the tale in this edition has been supplied from the earliest of these, 18, a MS written by Ardghaoill Úa Hanluainn c.1762–4. The additional quatrains in poem (vii) which are characteristic of MSS in this group have been relegated to a footnote, and the brief account of the death of Maine Lámhgharbh has been supplied from 6, the earliest MS in which this incident occurs” (1993, 61).¹⁴⁹

Accordingly, when G’s narrative fails, Mac Giolla Léith’s text runs on continuously, based upon the testimony of Maynooth M 103 (id., 127, 1.619 onwards). The break between G and Maynooth M 103 is unmarked by the edition. The testimony of RIA b iv 1, the earliest extant complete text of OCU, is also ignored from this point on, apparently on the grounds that its ending diverges from the characteristics of the ending of OCU which, Mac Giolla Léith believes, G ought to have contained (cf. Ó Flaithearta 1995, 76; Edel 1996, 332).¹⁵⁰ The neglect of RIA B iv 1, despite the frequently greater superiority of its readings compared to those from Maynooth M 103, constitutes the most fundamental criticism raised by various critics to Mac Giolla Léith’s edition (e.g. Breatnach 1994–5, 203–10; Ó Flaithearta 1995; Edel 1996).

Although several pertinent suggestions concerning the interpretation of episodes within the OCU-tradition are made, e.g. with regard to the probable process of harmonization between the disparate attributions of responsibility for the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 16–17, 57–58), the suitability of Mac Giolla Léith’s edition as a basis for further analysis is doubtful. The number of manuscript versions involved renders the pursuit of a definitive edition ill-conceived and impractical, viz. the difficulties experienced by Mac Giolla Léith in reducing the post-LMU manuscripts into a manageable group of texts (cf. Edel 1996, 332: “it seems [...] that for texts of this sort, for which a critical edition is an illusion, the term [‘edition’] ought to be altogether avoided”).

1.2.1: A new approach to *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*

Given the difficulties outlined above, it is expedient to suggest an alternative approach. Since the present study of the post-LMU tradition is primarily concerned with variation in the descriptions of the *maic Uisnig* and Deirdre, consideration of the earliest extant post-LMU text from which any description of this sort may be discerned, forms an integral part of the process of analysis. Consideration of the contents of G, therefore, is vital, including the text following the lacuna as well as events described beforehand, which is conspicuously absent from Mac Giolla Léith’s discussion (cf. Breatnach 1994–5, 201: “a crucial shortcoming of [his] edition is the failure to examine properly the evidence of the earliest MS witness”). The following analysis, proceeding

¹⁴⁹ Present author’s italics.

¹⁵⁰ Only a transcription of its contents is included (1993, 186–206).

from the contention that G contains a single continuous narrative, interrupted only by the absence of approximately 156 lines due to the excised bifolium, will adopt as its basis for discussion the OCU-text produced by the only editor to date to treat the contents of G in this fashion; i.e. the transcription and translation made by Donald Mackinnon which appeared in *The Celtic Review* between 1904 and 1908 (as 1 3.4 and 1.2, above). It is not my intention to reproduce a version of events which 'ought' to have occurred within the missing section of the text, although certain suggestions will be made regarding the possible course of its progression between the death of Illann Fionn and the discussion between Fergus and other warriors at the point at which the testimony of G resumes (i.e. at the top of column 17). The text of G will also be compared, where relevant, to the text of RIA B iv 1. Any such comparison must take account of the version of Deirdre's relationship with Conchobor and the *maic Uisnig* presented by Geoffrey Keating, whose influence, following the publication of *Foras Feasa Ar Éirinn* in 1634, was immediate and pervasive (cf. 1.3.10, below).

The following analysis, proceeding from the conclusions drawn throughout 3, above, concerning the nature of Deirdriu's characterisation within LMU, will also proceed from the suggestion made by Breatnach (1994–5; cf. Ó hUiginn 2006), that the depiction within G of Deirdre and the *maic Uisnig* was of importance to the text's author primarily insofar as their relationship with each other, and with Conchobor, also commented upon the character of Fergus mac Róich, and provided the ultimate cause of his departure from Ulster. That the course of events within G, following the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* and of Deirdre – i.e. the probable content of the missing text – does not share the same chronology as the concluding episode of LMU, is immediately apparent from the fact that, when the testimony of G resumes, Fergus is not only still resident in Ulster, but does not depart it until after the incursion of the three foreign warriors into his chamber. This event forms the basis for Bricriu's taunts of Fergus that this new form of dishonour is only the latest in a series of misdeeds, for which he is being mocked throughout the province (Mackinnon 1904–5, 210–15; cf. 3 2.2.6, above).¹⁵¹ It will be necessary to consider whether the argument for continuity can be sustained, following a closer examination of Deirdre's role within G's OCU-tale, or whether, pace Cathal Ó Háinle (2008), certain episodes within the text actually betray a greater emphasis upon Deirdre's characterisation, than upon the depiction of Fergus mac Róich.

One further, significant, difference between the testimony of G and that of LMU, is the fact that,

151 The excellence of Mackinnon's editorial principles, and his transcription of G, is marred only by his decision not to include line numbers for the transcription, an inconvenience compounded by the fact that the Irish version of the text and its English translation are printed within *The Celtic Review* upon facing pages. Fergus' discussion with Bricriu, therefore, occurs, in Irish, at pages 208, 210, and 212, whilst the translation occurs at 209, 211, and 213. For ease of reference, therefore, the full range of pages will be cited, e.g. 209–15.

due to the fact that G's narrative begins only after the *maic Uisnig* and Deirdre have been absent from Ulster for some time, the majority of events within LMU (i.e. episodes 2.2.1–2.2.4, as described in **3**, above) have no counterpart within the later tradition (at least, before the influence of Keating; as 1.3.10, below). Whilst certain details of the exiles' absence, and of the circumstances under which they departed Ulster, may be discerned from the conversation between Conchobor and the Ulstermen at the feast which forms the opening episode of the G-text (Mackinnon 1904–5, 12–13; cf. 1.3.1, below), there remains insufficient overlap to enable a close comparison to events within LMU. It is equally inaccurate, however, to claim that no comparisons may be drawn between the actants of LMU and characters with similar names and, in some cases, similar personalities within the later tradition, although it is apparent that there is little similarity between the strictly-ordered series of episodes outlined within LMU, and the looser chronology of events within G (as 1.3, below). A reprise of the techniques of narratological analysis applied to the structure of LMU, i.e. the *incipit-setting-result* formula (as **3** 2.2.1–2.2.7, above), will not, therefore, be attempted.

On the basis of both considerations, i.e. the need to re-examine Deirdre's depiction within G in light of arguments for the greater importance of Fergus mac Róich to its narrative, and the disparity between the series of events described by the earlier and later strands, it seems most propitious to assess not the sequential structure of G's contents, in a manner akin to the analysis of LMU in **3** 2.2.1–2.2.7, above, but rather to base the initial assessment of G's OCU-text upon its depiction of the characters also described by the earlier narrative strand (bearing in mind at all times the thoroughly diverse motivation underlying both texts' composition). How far, for example, does the development of Deirdre's characterisation, and the depiction of her relationship with Conchobor and the *maic Uisnig*, reflect the girl whose depiction, within LMU, served as a vehicle by whose manipulation misuses of Conchobor's *fír* could be explored (as **3** 2.3, above)? Has her portrayal within G retained a similar significance, and, if not, with what other intention, if any, has it been replaced? The analysis of G will proceed, therefore, with two initial questions in mind:

1. Do the named actants shared between LMU and the G-text retain the characteristics apparent within the earlier narrative?
2. Does Deirdre's relationship with Conchobor retain the significance argued for their association within LMU (as **3** 2.3, above)?

1.3: The narrative progression of the G-text

Before analysing their content, a brief description of events within G will be outlined. For ease of

subsequent reference, an episode number has been provided for each sequence of events.

1.3.1: Conchobor's feast at Emain Macha; the *maic Uisnig* are recalled (Mackinnon 1904–8, 12–17, 105)

The G-text opens with a description of the customary feasting arrangements at Conchobor's court at Emain Macha. We are told that, of the “three hundred three score and five” men comprising Conchobor's household, each man in turn is responsible for supplying provisions for the rest upon consecutive nights. A remark made by Borrach, during a later conversation with Conchobor [id., 104], implies that the warriors of Ulster do not dine at each other's houses in turn, but remain *in situ* at Emain whilst supplies are sent in: “Have you a feast for me?” said Conchobor. “Certainly I have”, said Borrach, “and I was able to prepare it, though I am not [currently] able to bring it to thee to Emain Macha”. As the men feast, musicians, players and poets entertain them (id., 12); those poets present at court upon the night the narrative commences are Cathbad, three sons of his, each named Genan, and Sencha mac Ailella. During the evening, Conchobor poses a question to the assembled warriors, asking whether they have ever observed throughout the world such a brave household as his: “we certainly have not”, they answer, “nor do we know if there be any” (id., 14). He enquires next whether anything is lacking from his court; when the warriors reject this suggestion, he wonders whether they might, nevertheless, feel the loss of the three sons of Uisnech, the “three torches of valour of the Gael” (ibid.), whereupon the Ulstermen confess that indeed, they had not dared to express this lack to his face before. Conchobor decrees that messengers will be sent to Loch Etive, the brothers' current location in Scotland, before recalling that one of Noísiu's prohibitions debars him from returning to Ireland, unless in the company of Cú Chulainn, Conall mac Aimirgin, or Fergus mac Róich. He asks of each of these men in turn what their response would be, were harm to befall the *maic Uisnig* whilst the brothers were under their protection: only Fergus replies that, of all the men in Ireland who might be held accountable in such a circumstance, Conchobor alone would not be harmed by him (id., 16). Conchobor dispatches Fergus to Scotland, requesting that, upon their return, the brothers should not be allowed to cease their journey until they reach Emain. At the same time, in private, he requests that Borrach invite Fergus to a feast, as it is one of Fergus' own prohibitions to refuse.

1.3.2: Fergus arrives in Scotland; Deirdre's first vision

With the guarantees of safety of the rest of the court added to his own, Fergus departs for Scotland, taking only his two sons, Illann Fionn and Buinne, and a boatman, Cuillen, for company. The party arrive in the vicinity of Loch Etive, where the *maic Uisnig* have three spacious dwellings laid out, and Fergus gives a great shout to announce his presence. Noísiu and

Deirdre are playing chess (id., 104). Although Noísiu recognises the cry as belonging to an Irishman, Deirdre knows at once that it belongs to Fergus. She conceals this knowledge, at this point in time and on two further occasions as Fergus calls out to them again, eventually revealing, when Noísiu has recognised Fergus himself and sent Ardán to greet him, that she kept silent due to foreboding inspired by a vision she experienced the night before (id., 106; see 1.4, below). Fergus is brought to them, and announces that he bears glad news, having been sent from Conchobor to pledge their safety should they return with him to Ireland. Upon Deirdre exclaiming that their property in Scotland is greater than that which was left behind, Fergus argues that the size of a person's holdings is of lesser importance than if the holdings, even of lesser size, are within his native land, a sentiment with which Noísiu concurs. When Fergus reiterates his pledge that no harm will come to the brothers as long as he is able to defend them (id., 108), Noísiu agrees that they will return with him to Emain, in spite of Deirdre's objections to the plan. As the company set sail, she utters an elegy in praise of their home in Scotland (id., 108–11).

1.3.3: Arrival at the house of Borrach; the second vision

The party dock at Borrach's fortress, and discover that a feast has been prepared. Borrach reminds Fergus that it is tabu for him to refuse a feast when one is offered, and Fergus grows angry at the difficulties of his position. He chastises Borrach for invoking his prohibitions, when his word has already been pledged to Conchobor to escort the *maic Uisnig* directly to Emain upon their return (id., 112). When Fergus turns to Noísiu for advice, Deirdre replies that he will accede to Borrach's request only if he is content to forsake the exiles. Fergus claims that it will not be forsaking them to send both his sons along with the company in his stead. Noísiu grows angry, exclaiming that no one has ever defended the brothers before now apart from themselves, and the exiles depart the fortress, leaving Fergus behind (id., 112). Deirdre suggests that they should make for *Inis Cuillenn*,¹⁵² and remain there until Fergus has feasted, which would fulfil his pledge to deliver them safely to Emain, but his sons complain that, upon the strength of their father's word, there would be nothing to fear even had the brothers none of their own arms with which to defend themselves, or anyone else present. Deirdre reiterates her premonition of foreboding in verse, anxious that they have returned to Ulster supported by Fergus' word alone; she is reproved by Noísiu, who insists that Fergus has not forsaken them. The company reach Sliab Fuait, where Deirdre experiences a second vision whilst she sleeps, awakening to tell Noísiu that she has seen each of the company, except for Buinne, deprived of his head (id., 116).

¹⁵² The location of this island is unknown; in later versions of the OCU-text it is usually said to be Rathlin. Within G, a word beginning 'cr' is visible after 'cuillenn', but its latter half is illegible. It is possible that the name of the boatman said to have accompanied Fergus and his sons to Scotland has been derived from an earlier association with this island, unexplored by G itself (as 1.3.2, above).

1.3.4: Arrival at Armagh; the third vision

Upon arrival at Armagh, Deirdre sees a cloud of blood hanging over Emain, and counsels anew that the company should not proceed onwards to Conchobor, but should seek out Cú Chulainn at Dundalk and await Fergus' return there (ibid.) Deirdre, in verse, expresses regret that Noísiu no longer heeds her advice as he once did.

1.3.5: Arrival at Emain; the premonition

As the company approach Emain, Deirdre tells Noísiu that, if they are admitted at once into Conchobor's own house, no harm will befall them, whereas quarter at Craobhruadh, the fort of the Red Branch, portends imminent treachery and ruin (id., 120). Conchobor, having questioned his attendants as to the amount of food awaiting them there, decrees that the exiles shall take their refreshment at Craobhruadh; once again, Deirdre advises turning back, and is reproached, this time by Fergus' son Illann (ibid.). The company enter the fortress and feast there, before Noísiu and Deirdre sit down to play chess.

1.3.6: Leborcham greets the exiles; Trendorn's fate

At the same time, Conchobor enquires of his own company which of the warriors present is willing to report back to him regarding the current state of Deirdre's appearance, having observed "whether her own form and figure remain to [her]" (id., 122). Leborcham volunteers; the narrator describes her former relationship with Noísiu as she makes her way towards the fortress, where she greets Noísiu and Deirdre affectionately, and expresses grief at the thought of the treachery likely to be seen in the land before the night has passed (ibid.). She returns to Emain, having advised the *maic Uisnig* to secure the fortress, and tells Conchobor that, whilst he should be glad that the brothers' martial prowess has been restored to Ireland, he should mourn the loss of Deirdre's beauty, for she has not retained her former pleasing shape and appearance (id., 124). It appears as if Conchobor's jealousy has been appeased, but a short time later he asks that another warrior set out upon the same mission. His request is twice met with silence, but upon the third occasion a warrior, Trendorn, agrees to go, having first been reminded by Conchobor that Noísiu killed his father. Trendorn, spying upon the company through the only un-shuttered window of the fortress, finds the chess game still in progress. When his presence is noticed, Noísiu picks up one of the eliminated pieces and hurls it towards the window, striking the warrior's eye from its socket (id., 126). Trendorn returns to Conchobor and tells him that Deirdre is as beautiful as she ever was.

1.3.7: Assault upon the Red Branch fort

Upon Trendern's return, the Ulstermen assemble and surround Craobhruadh, placing fires against its walls. When their presence is discovered, Illann cries out that the warriors are there in defiance of Fergus' surety, to which Conchobor replies that his conscience is troubled by Deirdre's continued association with the *maic Uisnig*. Inside the fort, Deirdre asserts that this action confirms Fergus' betrayal; Buinne exclaims that this is untrue, and that neither Fergus nor his sons have abrogated their responsibility for the exiles. He emerges from the fort, and kills three fifties of the Ulstermen and quenches the fires, only to accept Conchobor's hasty offer of land in return for the cessation of his onslaught (id., 128). Deirdre overhears their exchange, and exclaims that this is a son who is like his father; in response, Illann emerges from Craobhruadh, and slays three hundred warriors during three circuits of the house. Even once it grows dark, he continues to rebuff the enemy by lamplight, as Noísiu and Ainnle conduct another board game inside the fort. Illann refuses to come to terms with the Ulstermen as his brother did, whereupon Conchobor summons his son, Fiacha, born upon the same night as Illann, who is given his father's arms to bear just as Illann wields the arms of Fergus (ibid.). The two warriors meet each other, and when Fiacha is overcome by Illann he is forced to lie across the edge of his shield, which utters a great roar, causing the three chief waves of Ireland to surge up in response (id., 130). The wave of Rudraige is observed by Conall Cearnach at Dunseverick, who assumes that the threat it heralds is faced by Conchobor himself, and sets out to Emain to his aid. Arriving at Craobhruadh he finds Fiacha wounded, and none of the Ulstermen daring to approach, whereupon Conall, from behind, thrusts his spear through Illann. Fergus' son reproaches Conall for his action, exclaiming that the *maic Uisnig* were under the safeguard of his father, to which Conall enquires, "is that true"? "True indeed..." is the response.

The narrative is interrupted here, at the base of column 16, by the beginning of the textual lacuna (as figure 1, above).

1.3.8: *Fochunn Loingsi Fergus*

The text of G resumes at the top of column 17. The episode immediately following the lacuna makes no specific reference to the exploits of either Deirdre or the *maic Uisnig*, suggesting that their deaths have occurred at some stage within the missing text, but the impact of both the brothers' deaths, and the consequent damage to Fergus' honour, may be deduced throughout. The continued interplay of Ulster characters, notably Fergus and Conchobor, familiar from the text prior to the lacuna but also from their roles within LMU, and elsewhere, provides initial cause to suspect that the author of G has composed his text with recourse to a number of existing sources

(cf. Hull 1930, 294; cf. 1.4.1, below).

Columns 17–20 and 9–12 – reflecting the manuscript's unlayered folios, as above – i.e. the portion of text described by Mackechnie as outlining ‘*fochunn loingsi Fergusa*’, ‘the cause of Fergus’ exile’ from Ulster (as 1.1.1, above), describe Fergus’ behaviour in the wake of his decision to abandon the exiles for Borrach’s feast (as 1.3.3, above). Mackechnie’s designation was almost certainly intended to reflect the similarity between the most significant occurrence within this section, the discovery of intruders to Emain occupying Fergus’ private chamber, and the remaining fragment of the text entitled *Fochunn Loingse Fergusa meic Róig*, first extant within LL, but almost certainly composed in the early Old Irish period, circa 800 (Hull 1930, 294). Mackechnie’s division of the main body of G’s contents into three instalments, moreover – *Fochunn Loingsi Fergusa*, *Táin Bó Flidais*, and “Toraigeacht [sic] Tana Bo Flidaise” (as 1.1.1, above) – provides the most accurate representation to date of its gradually shifting emphasis, alongside the centrality of Fergus’ exploits to its narrative (see 1.4, below; cf. Breatnach 1994).

Following an absence of between 152 and 156 lines of text (as 1.1.1, above), G’s narrative resumes, at the close of what appears to have been a conversation between Fergus mac Róich and at least one other warrior, which concludes with the utterance of a section of verse beginning *secht muca marbta, miad n-gle*, ‘seven fat swine, greatly desired’ (Mackinnon 1904, 208–09). Fergus’ participation in the foregoing exchange is indicated by his statement, following the verse, that ‘*do genam-ne comarle re ‘r maithibh uime sin*’, ‘we will take counsel with our nobles about that’ (ibid.), whilst the context of his companions’ response,¹⁵³ that the terms under discussion should be accepted, suggests that some form of conflict has already ensued, and is in need of resolution. The subsequent reference to Conchobor identifies him as Fergus’ probable opponent, and raises the possibility that Fergus’ trust in the sincerity of the proffered terms may well be misplaced (*agus do meallatar é amlaid sin*, ‘and they deceived him thus’, i.e. concerning the arrangements for peace). The unease surrounding the negotiations is also suggested by the fact that the following year is described as a time of “anxiety and gloom” (ibid.), culminating in Fergus’ decision to undertake his annual circuit of Ulster. During his absence Conchobor prepares a feast, to which all the other nobles of the province are invited (id., 210–11). Whilst the guests consume food and drink, three foreign warriors arrive at Emain and, finding the door to the fortress unguarded, enter and take possession of *in n-imdaid n-alainn n-orda na mban n-aonntoma*, ‘the beautiful gold-gilded room of the single women’ (ibid.).¹⁵⁴ These men are

153 Fergus’ companions are named as Cormac Conloinges, Conall Cearnach’s son Uaithne, Angus the son of One-Handed Gaba (whom Mackinnon suggests should be identified with the Oengus mac Lama Gabaid in *Scéla Muicce meic Dathó*), Goibnenn mac Luirgnech, and several other unnamed chieftains (Mackinnon 1904, 20809).

154 DIL O 107, 51 suggests that the semantic range of *oentama* may include celibacy, but not necessarily virginity.

identified as Dubhloingsech mac Tribuait, Tribuait the great-grandson of Loingsech, and Durthach grandson of Fiach, former members of the household of Conaire son of Eterscéil.¹⁵⁵ Following the room's occupation, the warriors of Emain are alerted to the strangers' presence, either by some means unspecified by the text, or because at least some of them were already enjoying the women's company – the following statement, “and [the strangers] raised their weapons above their heads, and were instantly recognised”, renders the second possibility more probable (ibid.).¹⁵⁶ The apparent nature of the room, the strangers' occupation of it, and the reluctance of the Ulstermen to eject them, is revealed by the statement that “great silence fell on Conchobor and the others because of this [intrusion], for they were ashamed to put [the strangers] out of the room, and their being in it was an omen of great misdeeds” (ibid.).

The episode coincides with the return of Fergus to Emain, accompanied by Bricriu, who notices the presence of the strangers and informs Fergus at once of their incursion (ibid.). Fergus goes outside to apprise his chieftains of the situation; their prior ignorance of the matter presumably indicates their accompaniment of Fergus upon his circuit, and similarly recent return. He refers to the warriors' behaviour as *an sár mór agus an mí-comhall gotha sin*, 'that great outrage and ill-resulting slander' (id., 212–13).¹⁵⁷ Bricriu's response is highly suggestive of the mood of the text, in the wake of events lost beneath the lacuna:

“you have paid heavily for your voyaging, Fergus; for were the Ulstermen and Conchobor to promise you [illegible] they would not fulfil it. And the three torches of valour of the Gael have been slain in Emain while under your honour and protection. And the only subject for jest and mockery in Ulster, in Emain and in all Ireland is your attendance upon Conchobor after he has violated your safeguard. Tell me now, royal warrior, whither has gone that great renown and the vast power and reputation which you once enjoyed, when you are not so much as mentioned (now) in connection with deeds of heroism and valour” (id., 213).

Whilst this speech conveys an aura of trouble-making characteristic of Bricriu throughout the Ulster Cycle – most notably, of course, within *Fled Bricrenn* itself – his claims for the weakness

155 The similarity of the names of the men to the others' alleged ancestors suggests some confusion on the part of the author – or else, his sources – but their explicit connection to Conaire may also imply that the warriors are somewhat older than those whose festivities they interrupt. Donald Mackinnon points out the additional similarity between the name of 'Dubhloingsech mac Tribuait' and the epithet *dubhloinges*, commonly applied to the exiled Ulstermen fighting on the Connacht side during *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (id., 211; cf. Fergus' own use of the term, to describe the men who have accompanied him to Connacht, at id., 224).

156 The text is free from obvious innuendo at this point, but its careful designation of the place entered by the strangers as 'the room of the single women', coupled with the Ulstermen's response to their incursion, implies that the business of the room constitutes some form of venue for sexual intercourse. An earlier reader of the present author's copy of *The Celtic Review* I certainly concurred with this veiled suggestion; the word 'brothel' is inscribed in a meticulous copperplate hand in the margin.

157 Mackinnon translates *guth* in its primary meaning of 'noise' or 'sound', in this case a distressing one, but given the circumstances of the strangers' incursion, and the reluctance of the Ulstermen to remove them despite their obvious misgivings, it is clear that some aspect of honour has been breached; it is more likely, therefore, that Fergus' complaint to his chieftains would refer specifically to this, and the subsequent damage wreaked. Bricriu's response to his exclamation also implies that Fergus' honour has suffered personally from the strangers' conduct (as 1.4, below; cf. DIL s.v. II *guth*).

of Fergus' current reputation within the province are confirmed by his men, whereupon Fergus' indignation is aroused, and he calls upon his supporters to assault the fortress. In the ensuing onslaught, many of Ulster's young warriors are slain upon the green, including Fiacha, son of Conchobor, whose death at this point in the narrative suggests that he survived the wounds received from Fergus' son Illann during the Ulstermen's attack upon the *maic Uisnig* at Craobhruadh (as 1.3.7, above). The poets of Ulster, including Cathbad and some of his sons, discover the bodies of the youths, and lament for them, before offering Fergus many gifts, including a choice of rooms from amongst Conchobor's own apartments, upon the condition that the current occupants of the 'room of the women' are not disturbed. If he does not accept their offer, they continue, he will receive *imghuin agus imresuin agus immbualadh*, 'strife and quarrel and much smiting' (id., 214–15). Fergus' refusal of these terms is implicit in his men's subsequent series of raids throughout Ulster, before the company make a circuit of the province and its environs, and are finally welcomed at Cruachain by Medb and Ailill, who are promised, by Bricriu, that Fergus' skills alone can draw the current tension between their two provinces to a close (id., 220–21). Whilst festivities are under way in Connacht, word is brought to Fergus and Dubthach that Conchobor has slaughtered many of their sons in revenge for the deaths of Fiacha and the Ulster youths, whereupon the men launch a retaliatory attack in the company of Medb and Ailill. One casualty of the assault is Eogan mac Durthacht, whose death is effected by Fergus, before his fortress is burned and looted by the Connachtmen (id., 224–27). The raiding party return to Cruachain, having acquired great riches, but the mood of the following year in Connacht swiftly worsens when Medb 'conceives a passion for Fergus' (id., 226), and the pair engage in a dalliance which Ailill discovers, removing Fergus' sword during one such congress and replacing it with a wooden one, in an act reflecting the similar exchange of swords in *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (id., 228; cf. O'Rahilly 1976, ll.1039–80; 1306–10; 2506–08).

This episode, i.e. Mackechnie's '*fochunn loingsi Fergusa*', offers several indications of the course of events within G between the Ulstermen's assault upon Craobhruadh, and Fergus' negotiations for peace with Conchobor, now missing from the manuscript as a result of the textual lacuna. Bricriu's taunts that Fergus' diminished honour is the mockery of Ireland are centred upon his continued allegiance to Conchobor and the Ulstermen, despite the many abuses they have committed against him, foremost of which is Conchobor's slaughter of the *maic Uisnig* whilst their lives were in Fergus' care. Bricriu's statement suggests that, not only were the deaths of the brothers contrived in a similar way to the manner of their demise within LMU, but that other actants described by that text in connection with Conchobor's betrayal of Fergus also featured within G. Dubthach, for instance, during one of the raids made by Fergus' men around Ulster, is said to have killed the two daughters of Eogan mac Durthacht (Mackinnon 1904, 216–17), in a presumed act of retaliation, whilst the death of Eogan himself is contrived by Fergus (id., 226–

27). Eogan is one of only five named victims of Fergus' campaign, the others being Eogan's daughters Laidis and Lennabair, Conchobor's son, Fiacha, and Dáire son of Fedelmid.¹⁵⁸ Fiacha's participation in the assault upon Craobhrúadh is the only such activity attested by the remaining text. Given the nature of Eogan's role within LMU itself, however, it is perfectly credible that he should also have been associated with the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* within G (but see also 1.3.9, below).

1.3.9: RIA B iv 1

Shortly after the completion of Mackinnon's transcription from G, Margaret Dobbs drew attention to a series of passages within RIA B iv 1, apparently unnoticed by Mackinnon whilst preparing his text (Dobbs 1916, 133). This manuscript, formerly part of the Stowe collection (Ó Rahilly et. al. n.d., 588), contains another of the three copies of the later recension of *Táin Bó Flidais* [TBF²], as well as the earliest complete text of OCU, whose neglect, in relation to the analysis of G and its various defects, has been deservedly questioned by Caoimhín Breatnach (1994, 203–10; as 1.2, above). The copy of TBF² commences at 127 a of the manuscript, ending "imperfectly" (Ó Rahilly et. al. n.d., 590) at the top of 148 a. Several passages, which either differ in content, or provide superior readings to the comparable episodes within the latter part of G itself, were printed by Dobbs; the opening clause of the first of these episodes, *a haithle Chloinne hUislenn do mharbhadh ar slánaighecht Ferghusa mhic Róigh*, 'after the Children of Uisle [sic] had been slain while under the safeguard of Fergus son of Rógh', immediately connects the text to the foregoing events described by LMU and G. Only a few lines later, however, a verse beginning *secht muca marbta* also occurs, which duplication, coupled with the relevance of the passage's content to events occurring just prior to the lacuna within G, strongly suggests that at least some part of the opening section of the RIA B iv 1 version of TBF² was also recounted by the folio missing from G.

The episode in question within RIA B iv 1 describes the aftermath of the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* (Dobbs 1916, 134–35, 140–41). Fergus returns to Emain and is informed of their demise, but cannot find either Conchobor or 'any better deed to perform' than lamenting over the brothers' graves, presumably a reference to the fact that all persons involved in contriving the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* are absent from Emain, and Fergus, thereby, is unable to avenge their passing. After a list of Fergus' guarantors is provided, we are informed that he slaughtered and

¹⁵⁸ Two other women, the wives of Muinremar and Errge Echbel, are also said to have been slain by Dubthach (Mackinnon 1904, 216), but this detail should probably be equated with an expansion of the episode within LMU, in which he is responsible for the deaths of several unnamed women, *in genrad Ulad*, 'the maidens of Ulster' (Hull 1949, II.19798), rather than that these particular women were involved with the deaths of the *maic Uisnig*. Suggestions of expansion throughout this episode (i.e. Mackechnie's 'fochunn loingsi Fergus'), from elements present within LMU, are supported by further examples (cf. 1.4, below).

plundered throughout the province and assumed the lordship of Ulster for the following year, presumably in Conchobor's absence; according to another tradition, also attested, he assumed the kingship for seven years whilst Conchobor was in exile, known as the 'Black reign of Fergus', due to the fact that the sun did not shine upon Emain for its duration. The Ulstermen also grew restless and fought amongst each other, so that there was waste, destruction and disorder throughout the province. At the end of this time, representatives of the Ulstermen assembled to take counsel, and Cathbad spoke to Fergus concerning the smallness of the share of Ireland over which he currently held sway, also the cause of the darkness over Emain. He urges Fergus to accept greater wealth instead, including the *éraic*¹⁵⁹ of the *maic Uisnig*, and many treasures associated with the office of high kingship, such as a richly-decorated apartment within Emain for his personal use, and the hero's portion. This will remain untouched, Cathbad claims, even should Fergus be absent. The portion will consist of "seven vats, seven deer, seven prime boars, one beast of every kind of wild game and the drinking-horn of the hero Conchobor", to illustrate which, Cathbad recites the verse beginning *secht muca marbta*, 'seven fat swine', and etcetera.

In addition to the shared verse, the passages within G succeeding the lacuna provide several indications to support the suggestion that the absent text bore at least some resemblance to the events recounted above. The persons with whom Fergus debates the terms of negotiation within G include several warriors named as his guarantors by RIA B iv 1, e.g. Cormac Conloinges, Angus the son of One-Handed Gaba, and Goibnenn mac Luirgnech (Dobbs 1916, 134). More significantly, Cathbad's insistence that Fergus should accept richly-decorated apartments within Emain, to be maintained even during his absence, casts a certain amount of light upon the apparent urgency of the situation within G, arising in the wake of the liberties taken by the three foreign warriors with the 'gold-gilded room of the single women'. Fergus' anger, his designation of the proceedings as a 'great outrage' – which may refer either to the behaviour of the foreign warriors or, more probably, to the Ulstermen's own – and the reaction of his faithful men, is consistent with the supposition that his former claims upon this room constituted a facet of the 'greater wealth' he was urged to accept by the learned men of Ulster within RIA B iv 1, and which represents, at least partially, his justified lordship (cf. Bricriu's reference to Fergus as *rí-milidh*, 'royal warrior' [Mackinnon 1904, 212]). Fergus' circuit of Ulster, undertaken within the G-text, is also consistent with the promises he appears to have accepted from Cathbad within RIA B iv 1.

Certain discrepancies, however, also exist between the accounts of the aftermath of the deaths of *maic Uisnig* provided by G and RIA B iv 1. When Fergus, within the latter, returns to Ulster and learns of the brothers' demise, Conchobor is conspicuous by his absence. Fergus assumes the

159 Lit. 'body-fine', a fixed payment due to the family of a homicide; cf. Kelly 1988, 124, 141.

kingship, either for a single year or for seven, apparently in response to this absence, and it is only after the ravages committed by his unquiet warriors have been soothed by Cathbad's intervention, that are we left with the situation we also seem to encounter at the recommencement of the post-lacuna text within G. The copy of OCU also found within RIA B iv 1 testifies to the banishment of Conchobor from Ulster (see below). If, however, the missing text of G itself contained this reference, and proceeded to describe activities at Emain in a similar manner to their depiction within RIA B iv 1, there cannot have been any indication of how Conchobor resumed his governance of Ulster, whereas G's account of his arrangement of the feast at Emain, in Fergus' absence, implies that he has done so (Mackinnon 1904, 208–09). Bricriu's taunting of Fergus in the same manuscript, moreover, implies that his current ridicule by the men of Ireland is due to his having continued to dance attendance upon the men of Ulster, including Conchobor, who had contrived to arrange the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* and Fergus' consequent disgrace (as 1.3.8, above). It is possible to reconcile both accounts, however, by assuming that, in consequence of the 'Black reign of Fergus', Conchobor has been invited to resume his kingship by the same men who offer Fergus, instead, the sop of a 'greater share of the province' than he currently holds – the implicit meaning, presumably, being that he must obtain this for himself, whilst the tokens of some small portion of the usual privileges of the high-kingship, i.e. the 'room of the single women', are maintained at Emain in his name. Fergus' response to Cathbad's offer, that “should any one of these conditions be broken, my friendship with Conchobor is gone forever” (Mackinnon 1904, 208–09), appears to support this conjecture, as well as confirming the reasons for Conchobor's evident distress when the foreign warriors' invasion of the women's room is discovered.

We have yet to address what is arguably the most significant gap in our knowledge of G's narrative testimony – i.e. the precise manner in which the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* themselves, and of Deirdre, were brought about. The mere fact of the brothers' deaths, and that Conchobor and, presumably, Eogan mac Durthacht as well, were involved in their contrivance, is attested by the episode immediately following the lacuna (as 1.3.8, above), although Deirdre is not mentioned, and Fergus' disgrace, in the wake of the violation of his guarantee, is imbued with greater significance by the text than whatever may have happened to the brothers' former companion (cf. 1.4, below). No further detail is provided, in fact, to explain her disappearance from the text, either within G itself, or by the opening section of TBF² from RIA B iv 1. As noted, however, this manuscript also contains our earliest complete copy of OCU itself – does this text, then, cast any further light upon the matter?

The narrative in G breaks off, as we have seen, during the Ulstermen's assault upon Craobhrúadh, when Conall Cearnach has arrived at Emain and assaults Illann, Fergus' son, whilst unaware of

his identity. The course of events within the RIA B iv 1 OCU continues thus: apprised of Illann's name, though it is too late to save him, Conall turns upon Fiacha mac Conchobuir and cuts off his head (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 199).¹⁶⁰ Illann, in a final act of support for the *maic Uisnig*, throws his weapons behind him towards the fortress, and urges Noísiu to fight bravely. The Ulstermen set fires around Craobhruadh, quenched by Ardán when he makes a further foray into their midst, killing three hundred men. Ainnle kills six hundred more, and drives the enemy into retreat from the fort, before Noísiu trounces those who have remained, slaying a further two hundred. Whilst praising their bravery, Deirdre reminds the brothers once again that they ought to have heeded her advice that Conchobor's word was not to be trusted. The *maic Uisnig* break free from Craobhruadh, and the assembled Ulstermen, by making three great leaps over its walls, with their shields in front of them and Deirdre protected between. Concerned by their success against his men, Conchobor turns to Cathbad for assistance, asking that he use his magic to halt their advance before all of Emain is destroyed – he claims, moreover, that the brothers will have nothing to fear from him afterwards, which Cathbad believes. He orders an enchanted wave to surround Craobhruadh, forcing the brothers to swim, and their weapons fall from their hands, before which time, nonetheless, the Ulstermen do not dare to approach them. Conchobor announces, despite his pledge, that the brothers must be killed, but none of the Ulstermen present will agree to carry out his command, as there is not one amongst them upon whom Noísiu, in the past, has not bestowed wages. Finally Maine, son of the king of Lochlann, presents himself, announcing that Noísiu was responsible for the deaths of his brothers, Uathach and Triathach, and that he will carry out Conchobor's command. The *maic Uisnig* begin to argue as to which of them will be killed first, until Noísiu reminds them that his sword is of sufficient length to remove all their three heads at once. The deed is carried out by Maine, and the assembled Ulstermen lament the brothers' passing. Whilst the men are occupied thus, Deirdre wanders upon the green of Emain and meets Cú Chulainn, to whom she relates the news of the brothers' deaths, and that Maine was responsible for their beheading. She and Cú Chulainn arrive at the place where the brothers' bodies lie, whereupon Deirdre begins to dishevel her hair and lament for them, uttering two lays (nos. vii and viii within Mac Giolla Léith's classification; 1993, 27), before drinking blood from the men's wounds and leaping into the grave beside them. The text of OCU in RIA B iv 1 concludes as follows:¹⁶¹

160 The suggestion made later within both G and RIA B iv 1, that Fiacha is killed during Fergus' retaliatory assault upon Emain, is, presumably, an authorial oversight, consistent also with the account of Eogan's death at Fergus' hand (as 1.3.8, above). Deeds committed by both men are recounted within *Táin Bó Cuailnge*.

161 *Et as a haithle sin do mhallaigh Cathbhadh Eamhain fa mhacaibh Uisneach do <do> marbhadh innte ar a ionchaibh fein tar eis Chonchubhair do thabhairt gheallta 7 choingheall dó fana mhionnaibh 7 fana armaibh nach muirfeadh Clann Uisneach da n-imreadh se dráoidheacht orra 7 a tabhairt chuige féin no go réidhigheadh sé riú. 7 do saoil Cathbhadh gan chontabhairt gurb fhíor dho Chonchubhar sin. Agus is annsin adubhairt Cathbhadh na biadh Conchubhar an Eamhain Mhacha ina aon nduine dhá shiol on bhfionghail sin amach go bruinne an bhrátha 7 go foircionn an bheatha. 7 do fíoradh an sgél sin or [ní] raibhe Eamhain ag Conchubhar na ag aon nduini dha lorg on aimsir sin a leith. Conadh í oidhe 7 feall Cloinni hUisneach go nuige sin* (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 205).

And after that Cathbad cursed Emain on account of the Sons of Uisneach being killed in it, (a slight) on his own honour after Conchobor had given him a promise and pledge, on his halidoms and his arms, that he (Conchobor) would not kill the Children of Uisneach if he (Cathbad) bespelled them, and delivered them to him so that he (Conchobor) might make peace with them. And Cathbad firmly supposed that Conchobor was telling the truth.

And it is then that Cathbad stated that Conchobor would not be in Emain Macha, or anybody of his seed, from that kinslaying till the brink of doom and the end of the world. And that prognostication was proved true, for neither Conchobor nor any person of his posterity possessed Emain from that time to the present. So that is the violent death of, and the treachery inflicted upon, the Children of Uisneach, thus far.¹⁶²

RIA B iv 1 appears to provide a concise account of the manner in which the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* were contrived. There remain, however, several problematic elements within the text itself, as well as at least two compelling reasons to doubt whether the description of the brothers' demise within G itself may have taken a similar course. Most significantly, the section of text following the brothers' beheading by Maine contains two separate occasions upon which Deirdre is said to have met with Cú Chulainn, and described to him the manner of the brothers' deaths. The first occurs, as in the above synopsis, immediately after the brothers' beheading, when Deirdre wanders freely upon the green as the Ulstermen are distracted by their mourning (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 201). Cú Chulainn expresses his sorrow for the men's passing, and enquires as to their murderer's identity, before the pair arrive at the place where the *maic Uisnig* are laid, and Deirdre begins to grieve for them. The second occasion, upon which the same basic exchange of information occurs, is placed after the performance of Deirdre's first lament, following a repetition of the information that the Ulstermen are currently too much preoccupied with each other to pay attention to her whereabouts. Wandering upon the green, she encounters Cú Chulainn and informs him of her companions' deaths, to which Cú Chulainn replies that Noísiu was the dearest person to him upon the earth, before requesting to know the identity of the brothers' killer (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 202). Following this exchange, Deirdre stoops to drink blood from the brothers' bodies, an action described as being done 'to excess' (*go humarcach*). The duplication of her meetings with Cú Chulainn could have been taken as a simple scribal error, but for the fact that his responses to Deirdre's news differ upon each occasion, and it is possible that the scribe's apparent recourse to more than one version of events should be seen to support Cathal Ó Hainle's arguments that, post-LMU, the account of Deirdre's relationship with the *maic Uisnig* provided by G was not, in fact, the only one in circulation (2008, e.g. 453; see 1.4 and 5 1.2, below).¹⁶³

In addition to this discrepancy, the RIA B iv 1 account of the brothers' deaths makes no reference

¹⁶² I am indebted to Professor Gillies for assisting with the translation of these passages.

¹⁶³ The differing periods of time suggested for the length of Fergus' kingship of Ulster, following the brothers' deaths, also supports this conjecture.

to any role played by Eogan mac Durthacht, which, if the detail of its narrative were similar to the missing description of the same episode within G, would be surprising, given G's emphasis, once the text has resumed, upon the seemingly retaliatory behaviour of both Fergus and Dubthach towards Eogan and his daughters (as 1.3.8, above). Eogan's replacement by Maine as the brothers' executioner finds no echo in G, despite his similar absence from the comparable role within *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne* (as 3 2.4, above; cf. Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 16–17). Moreover, despite its divergence from the detail of the comparable section of LMU, Conchobor's request that, in order to overcome the brothers' successful resistance of the Ulstermen's assault upon Craobhruadh, Cathbad has recourse to his druidic arts, is not incongruous with the frequent reference throughout the earlier portion of G to prophecy and prognostication, mainly formulated by Deirdre (as 1.4, below).

One further aspect of RIA B iv 1 must also be considered – the significance of the placement within the manuscript of the texts of OCU and TBF². Not only does RIA B iv 1 preserve a clear distinction between the two tales, but OCU occurs at a later stage of the manuscript, at folios 186 a – 192 a (Ó Rahilly et. al. n.d., 591). Its colophon is followed by the signature of the scribe, Dáibhí Ó Duibhgeanáinn, and the date September 4 1671 (ibid; cf. Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 30). Whilst the opening section of TBF² in RIA B iv 1 clearly refers to a version of OCU with a similar, if not identical, conclusion to the one depicted later within that manuscript, the separation of the respective tales from each other indicates, at the very least, that, by the time of the manuscript's compilation, the description of Fergus' dishonour regarding the deaths of the *maic Uisnig*, and his subsequent foray into Connacht, was no longer considered as an inherently continuous narrative – if, indeed, it ever was (cf. 5, below). Whilst a gradual evolution of such interrelated material into the Early Modern period is by no means confined to this example, it is probable, in this case, that one particular influence was felt, namely that of the version of similar events compiled by Geoffrey Keating within *Foras Feasa as Éirinn*.

1.3.10: 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach'

Completed sometime during the 1640s, but possibly as early as 1634 (Comyn 1902, xi; Cunningham 2000, 59), Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* [FFE], or *History of Ireland*, remains the best-represented text of the Early Modern Irish period, copied and circulated in manuscript form from barely five years after its completion (Cunningham 2000, 10). Its effect upon the transmission of OCU, in the wake of its publication, cannot be over-estimated, given that almost half the extant manuscripts of the latter contain either Keating's introduction or his epilogue, describing Deirdre's death (as 1 2.1, above). The account of her relationship with the *maic Uislenn* within the text of FFE seems to have possessed an unusual textual authority, showing

very little variation between versions (e.g. the sections appended by O’Flanagan to his 1808 edition; as 1 2.3, above). It also inherits, from the general tone of Keating’s text, an aura of historical fact. Placed within section 32 of the first book of FFE (Dinneen 1905, ll.2940–3064),¹⁶⁴ events detailing Deirdre’s life, and her effect upon Ulster, follow a brief description of the settlement of the province (section 28; ll.2470–72), and the mounting tension between Ulster and Connacht, which reaches a climax during the respective reigns of Medb and Conchobor (section 31; ll.2932–38). This context, together with the manner in which the episode is introduced, suggests that Keating intended Conchobor’s violation of Fergus’ guarantee to be viewed as the focal point of the tale, claiming that his betrayal of Fergus was the ultimate cause of the enmity existing between himself and Medb (ll.2035–36). Nevertheless, Keating’s description of events leading to this betrayal is framed by the lifespan of Deirdre, and her personal association with the characters involved.

Commencing at the feast in Feidlimid’s house, Keating describes Deirdre’s birth (ll.2940–49); her secluded upbringing (ll.2950–65); her meeting, and ultimate departure from Ulster with the *maic Uislenn* (ll.2965–70); the exiled party’s sojourn in Scotland (ll.2970–76); and their return to Ulster under the promised protection of Fergus, Dubthach and Cormac Conloinges (ll.2976–87). At Conchobor’s behest, Noísiu and his brothers are killed by Eogan mac Durthacht (ll.2989–98), and Deirdre is returned first to Conchobor’s custody, then bestowed upon Eogan (ll.3031–41). Travelling in his chariot alongside the two men, Deirdre is alarmed by Conchobor’s comparison of her position to that of a ‘sheep between two rams’, and leaps (*baioithléim*)¹⁶⁵ from the chariot, inadvertently catching her head upon a rock so that her skull shatters (ll.3041–53). Between the death of the *maic Uislenn*, and Deirdre’s torpor as Conchobor’s recaptured prize, Keating describes Fergus’ reaction to the news of his violated guarantee, whereupon he and Dubthach return to Emain, kill Conchobor’s son and three hundred of his warriors, burn his fortress and slaughter his women-folk (ll.3003–04), before being accepted into Medb’s service in Connacht, from whence they continue to harass Ulster and the district of Cuailnge for the following seven years (ll.3007–13). Fergus’ union with Medb during this time is also described, along with the birth of their three sons, Ciar, Corc and Conmhac, and the western regions named in the children’s honour (ll.3014–30).

It is clear that Keating’s primary source was LMU itself, and the structure of the episode – designated ‘Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach’ within Osborn Bergin’s *Scélaigheacht Chéitinn* (1930, 2–5) – is not dissimilar, but several notable features important to the progress of LMU are

¹⁶⁴ All subsequent line references, unless otherwise stated, are to this edition.

¹⁶⁵ *Baoithléim* denotes a wild leap, bound, or spring – a foolish act (cf. *baioithe*), not representative of a calculated, deliberate intention (Dinneen 1927, 78).

omitted. There is only veiled reference, for example, to Conchobor's arrangement of Eogan's presence in Emain upon the exiles' return, and Fergus' compromised decision to consume a feast instead of maintaining his accompaniment of the brothers, is also omitted. Moreover, the text displays an awareness of material relating to the activities of Fergus, to which LMU itself does not refer. Where the testimony of Keating's rendition is most significant, however, is during those episodes which display the influence of LMU, but possess notably different emphasis. The majority of these episodes concern the portrayal of Deirdre. Following her discovery of Noísiu's existence, for instance, it is not Leborcham who indicates where the man might be found, but Deirdre who requests that he be brought, in secret, to meet her (ll.2961–65), replacing the passivity of her response within LMU that 'I will not be well, then, until I see him' (as 3 2.2.2, above). At the same time, the increased boldness of Deirdre's presentation appears to have replaced the greater complexity of several of the episodes within LMU in which she and Noísiu interact, primarily during the conversation which precipitates their departure from Ulster. The earlier version of the episode involves Deirdre's comparison of the opposing status of Conchobor and Noísiu in animalistic terms, the 'young bull' to the 'bull of the province' (as 3 2.2.3, above), followed by the moment when she grasps hold of his two ears. Whilst the essence of their exchange remains ambiguous, it is clear that it involves some kind of compelling aspect, which ultimately overrides Noísiu's concerns of dishonouring his overlord. Keating asserts, instead, that Noísiu responded to Deirdre's request and came to visit her in secret, whereupon she reveals 'how greatly she loves him', and 'besought him to elope with her from Conchobor' (FFE ll.2966–70). The aspect of compulsion is absent, and is unaccompanied by the anguished exchange, within LMU, between Noísiu and his brothers, concerning the extent to which their respective loyalties to Conchobor are now in conflict with the position of dishonour into which Deirdre's behaviour has thrust them. Keating's explanation for the exiles' departure from Ulster, therefore, is dependent upon Deirdre's professed love for Noísiu, an element of romance entirely unsupported by the comparable scene within LMU (as 3 2.2.3 and 2.3, above). The earlier ambiguity of Deirdre's relationship with Conchobor, however, is resolved: quite unlike the "indeterminate conjugal union" (Buttimer 1994–5, 27), established within LMU from the moment the infant Deirdre is preserved from the Ulstermen's wrath, Keating has Conchobor declare, in response to the same situation, *béaraidh mise liom í agus cuirfead da hoileamhain í go raibhe 'n-a haonmhaoi agam féin*, 'I will take her with me and put her to nurse so that she may become my own wife' (FFE ll.2947–49). Keating also addresses the slight uncertainty within LMU surrounding Conchobor's betrayal of Fergus – i.e. whether or not his luring of Fergus away from his duties as guarantor to the *maic Uislenn* is merely practical, the removal of an obstacle to their successful murder, or born of a personal desire to undermine further the man whose kingship he once stole (as 3 2.3, above). The ambiguity within LMU is compounded by the fact that the *maic Uislenn* themselves request Fergus to stand as their guarantor. Keating declares, instead, that the

decision to send Fergus, Dubthach and Cormac is made by Conchobor (FFE II.2976–78).

Although Keating's version of these events clearly displays an awareness of source material other than LMU, the narrative is primarily defined by the relationship of those events to Deirdre's involvement within them. Keating's rendition, in other words, is the first extant version in which Deirdre's character is afforded pre-eminence – within the text itself we find reference to 'Deirdre, who gave rise to the events we have narrated' (FFE I.3032). This hypothesis, furthermore, is not solely dependent upon the fact that the tale's narrative commences with her birth and concludes with her death, but is supported by other decisions made by Keating in his handling of his source material, several of which imply an awareness of the dossier of Fergus mac Róich, unattested by LMU itself but found elsewhere, within G and also in other Ulster Cycle texts such as *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. Fergus' revenge upon the inhabitants of Ulster, for example, includes the death of the personage 'Maine maic Conchobuir', whose mere presence within the text may indicate Keating's attempt to reconcile the information provided by disparate sources – i.e. a conflation of Fiacha's role within G, with that of Maine the king of Lochlainn's son who volunteers to behead the *maic Uislenn*. The extent of Fergus' activities in Connacht is also treated in greater depth than within LMU, and the emphasis upon the eponymous territorial possessions of the three sons whom he sires upon Medb lends weight to the suggestion that Fergus' importance within the Early Modern Irish literary canon is heavily dependent upon the weight subsequently attached to his ancestral heritage (cf. Ó hUiginn 1992, 61; Ó hUiginn 2006). Yet the omission of several other aspects of Fergus' role, of extreme importance to the progression of narrative within LMU – e.g. his abandonment of the exiles for a feast – suggests that the foregrounding of Fergus was not, in fact, the primary purpose of Keating's text, and that the description of his involvement with Connacht ultimately reinforces the theme of repetitious conflict between that province and Ulster, within which the account of Deirdre's relationship with the *maic Uislenn* is also framed. The legacy of Keating's own text lies in his innovative emphasis upon Deirdre's boldness, her expression of romantic love for Noísiu, and her general pre-eminence within the narrative, each of which the subsequent popularity of his version of events helped reinforce, and whose effect, even upon modern critics' interpretations of Deirdre's character and the importance of her role within LMU, continues to be felt (as 1 2.6, above).

1.4: The characterisation of Deirdre in the later tradition

In comparison to the characteristics identified at 3 2.3, above, the Deirdre of the author of the G-text differs markedly. The girl whose overriding passivity throughout LMU, and propensity to react, rather than implement, is depicted within G as an observant counsellor, offering advice to her companions and exhibiting profound awareness of their worsening predicament. In contrast

to the paucity of unsolicited statements made by Deirdriu within LMU, upon more occasions than otherwise throughout the G-text remarks made by Deirdre are unprompted, and respond to her perception of the current situation rather than directly to the words of another. Of great significance, furthermore, is the impact of these remarks upon both the other characters, and the progression of the narrative itself. From an examination of the persons to whom her remarks are addressed, as well as of the circumstances in which they are spoken, it is possible, I suggest, to argue that Deirdre's later character retains at least some aspects of the character depicted within the earlier tradition. This is most notable, within LMU, regarding the extent to which her character is used to demonstrate Conchobor's abuses of his *fír* (as 3 2.3, above). As stated above, however (at 1.2.1), it remains to be established whether Deirdre, within the later tradition first represented by the G-text, enjoys the same association with Conchobor as that by which their relationship was defined within LMU. It is clear, in fact, even from the first episode in which she appears, that their relationship is dissimilar, and that, furthermore, the greater majority of Deirdre's remarks, and her general characterisation, are more distinctly intertwined with the author's depiction of someone else – of Fergus mac Róich, about whom, according to Caoimhín Breatnach (1994–5), the majority of action within the G-text is actually arranged. The following sections will explore, firstly, Deirdre's later characterisation in comparison to the Deirdriu of the earlier tradition, and, secondly, the manner in which her depiction within G is achieved, in relation to those other characters about whom the progression of the plot revolves.

The most notable divergence between Deirdre and Deirdriu is the significantly greater proportion of speech, including conversation, in which Deirdre is involved throughout the G-text. Whereas, within LMU, Deirdriu utters speech upon only five occasions – a sixth, when she converses with the king of Scotland's steward, is only implied (LMU II.151–55) – there are many more occasions within G during which Deirdre not only participates in dialogue, but is responsible for its inception, even to the extent that the action of a particular episode turns upon her contribution. These episodes differ in nature from the examples attested within LMU, when, with a single exception, Deirdriu responds to others' stimuli rather than initiating action or plot development, and is not responsible for engineering change within the narrative to the same extent as Deirdre.¹⁶⁶ Throughout the G-text, Deirdre's primary role initially appears to be connected with the protection of the *maic Uisnig*, and the attempt to prevent them from returning to Ulster (cf. Breatnach 1994–5, 102). She seeks to circumvent their intention by regaling the brothers with visions and premonitions of the dangers facing the company should they continue on their journey. The manner in which these forebodings are expressed, however, directs the attention of the brothers not only towards the nature of the dangers they face, but also towards its perpetrators

¹⁶⁶ The exception, Deirdriu's request to Noísiu to be removed from Ulster, may, as we have seen, have enjoyed greater relevance within the earlier *aithed*, and been directly influenced by it (as 3 2.3, above).

– towards Conchobor and, more prominently, towards Fergus mac Róich. Fergus' untrustworthiness and vacillation are depicted as the principal threats with which the exiles are faced. The author's intentions regarding the composition of his text are expressed, ultimately, by his arrangement of the narrative, and of the characterisation of the actants around which its progression is organised. Deirdre's prophetic utterances, therefore, constitute a means by which these intentions may be realised. From the first words she utters, seeking to conceal from Noísiu that Fergus is approaching their dwelling at Loch Etive, the descriptions of her visions and premonitions advance the narrative from stage to stage. Visions two and three, and the final premonition, occur following the party's arrival at three successive destinations, and precipitate their departure for the next. At the same time, their respective contents introduce both the action of the subsequent episode, and the persons by whose actions the plot will be shaped. The character with whom three of Deirdre's visions are preoccupied is Fergus mac Róich. Her, and the author's, antipathy towards Fergus is apparent from the first episode in which both appear together.¹⁶⁷

Shortly before the first vision is outlined – also Deirdre's first contribution to the dialogue – she and Noísiu are playing chess, just as Fergus arrives at their dwelling-place and calls out towards the fort (Mackinnon 1904–8, 104). Through narratorial commentary, the audience is privy to her thoughts before they are verbally expressed, being informed that Deirdre immediately recognises Fergus' voice, but chooses to conceal this awareness from the *maic Uisnig*. At once, we are lead to suspect that Fergus' imminent arrival will be of little benefit to the exiles. The narratorial intrusion itself, a stylistic device employed upon only a few occasions throughout LMU, but with greater frequency here, suggests from the outset a markedly different style of authorship, as well as a markedly different characterisation of Deirdre. Her first spoken words confirm this suspicion, as she attempts to persuade Noísiu that the cry which he thinks has been made by an Irishman, i.e. someone to whom he ought to respond, could equally have been uttered by a Scot. When Fergus calls out for a third time, Noísiu himself recognises his voice and sends Ardán to greet him; it is only then that Deirdre confesses she was aware of Fergus' identity, and forbore to reveal it due to a vision experienced the night before. Her revelation is unsolicited; Noísiu requests to know the cause of her reticence, and is then regaled with a description of the vision itself, learning of the three birds who will 'come from Ireland bearing three sips of honey in their beaks but withdraw with three sips of blood' (id., 106). The pattern in which the subsequent dialogue between these two is arranged, maintains this structure throughout the rest of the extant

167 As far as we are made aware, Deirdre does not learn of the conversation between Fergus and Conchobor during the scene when guarantors for the *maic Uisnig* are being arranged (as 1.3.1, above). Her distrust of Fergus should be seen to be based, therefore, upon a more general wariness concerning his character, explored in increasing detail throughout the text, on each occasion when he fails to respond to opportunities to overcome his dilemma (see below).

text: Deirdre's initial suggestions that the company should either desist in their journey, or seek the protection of another warrior, come unsolicited, are then rebuffed, and are followed by a claim to have witnessed a vision, in which her premonition of danger is revealed at greater length. These expositions are made in response to a question from Noísiu, asking, firstly, why she has lagged behind the rest of the party (id., 114, when she describes having seen each of the exiles, apart from Buinne, lacking their heads); and secondly, upon arrival at Armagh, when she offers her counsel as to how the party should proceed (id., 116; when her counsel is rejected, she utters the series of verses which constitute the third vision, of the cloud of blood surrounding Emain). Her final foreboding (id., 118–120), that the party will be alerted to Conchobor's intentions regarding their safety by the choice hostel to which they are directed, is itself unsolicited, but also differs from the rest in that Fergus, except by implication, is not involved. His successive misjudgements may have led them here, but it is upon Conchobor's mercy that their safety now depends.

The very nature of the visions experienced by Deirdre further underlines the divergence of her portrayal, from that of the largely silent, naïve Deirdriu. Deirdre's descriptions of her visions are conspicuous for their verbiage, and their prophetic quality replaces the predictions voiced by Cathbad at the beginning of LMU. This shift in emphasis between the earlier and later narrative strands is interesting, because it suggests that the fatefulness associated with Deirdriu's own person throughout LMU is not the same phenomenon that the author of the G-text wishes to emphasise. It is possible, as Hull suggests (1949, 1), that audience familiarity with earlier versions of Deirdriu's relationship with the Ulster court would still have been brought to bear upon the characterisation of the actants of the G-text – i.e. it could have been recalled that Deirdre herself was formerly the subject of prophecies of exceeding negativity – yet no attention whatsoever is paid by the G-text to Deirdre's own reception by Conchobor, should the company return to Ulster, as opposed to the probable fate of the *maic Uisnig*. Any part she may have played in bringing about their exile is referred to, in passing, only twice. Had it been the author's intention to attach similar foreboding to Deirdre's future, or to her responsibility, perceived throughout LMU, for the brothers' own fate, it is significant that she is not once made to express unease for herself, in the way that she displays anxiety for the *maic Uisnig*, and no other person prophesies upon her behalf. Rather, it is the downfall of the *maic Uisnig* and, most especially, Fergus' part in bringing this about, which forms the substance of Deirdre's visions.

The first of these premonitions visualises three birds arriving in Scotland from Emain, offering three sips of honey in their beaks, but carrying away three sips of blood (Mackinnon 1904–8, 106). The second, upon their arrival at Sliab Fuait, occurs after Deirdre, having lagged behind the rest of the company and fallen asleep, wakes to tell Noísiu that she dreamed of each of them,

except for Buinne, deprived of their heads (id., 114–116). The third, expounded in verse upon their arrival at Armagh, concerns the cloud of blood which Deirdre claims to see hanging in the sky above Emain, (id., 116–118), whilst the fourth foretells the outcome of their sojourn in Conchobor's company, depending upon the fortress to which they are directed upon arrival (id., 118–120; this foreboding differs slightly from the rest, as noted above). In comparison to LMU, moreover, in which the fulfilment of Cathbad's prophecies does not appear to be the foremost concern of its author (as 3 2.2.1 and 2.2.6, above), the course of G's narrative is neatly foreshadowed by each of Deirdre's predictions. Fergus, who has travelled to Loch Etive alongside his two sons, receives three kisses upon his arrival, but ultimately heralds a bloody death for the three men who greet him; Buinne, by reason of the accord reached with Conchobor during the assault upon Craobhrúadh, will be the only one of the exiles and their guarantors to have retained his head by the end of the narrative (cf. 1.3.9, above);¹⁶⁸ Conchobor's choice of hostel for the exiles' meal renders it possible for the Ulstermen to surround it, and harm befalls the company there. The remaining vision, Deirdre's claim to have seen Emain surrounded by blood, should probably be considered figurative, and is therefore also confirmed, before the end of the text, by the actual blood spilled during successive assaults by the Ulstermen and Fergus' sons upon each other during the siege. During the course of her verses, Deirdre's repeated insistence that the company should seek the protection of Cú Chulainn at Dundalk (id., 118), also draws attention to their current predicament, the result of Fergus' desertion.

The author's reliance upon prophecy and foreshadowing suggests a foregone conclusion for the lifespan of the brothers, but also that it is important for the audience's attention to be consistently directed towards the means by which their deaths will be achieved. From the very first scene in which Fergus is depicted alongside the *maic Uisnig*, Deirdre's reluctance to reveal his arrival implies that his desire to see them to Emain in safety will ultimately prove inauspicious, and, from this point on, successive disappointments dog the steps of the party as they draw closer to Ulster, and to Conchobor. Fergus himself is provided with little opportunity to address Deirdre's unease, or to assuage it. From the moment the company arrive at Borrach's fortress, and its owner issues the invitation to dine there, Fergus allows himself to be swayed by others' suggestions, beginning with his inability to resolve for himself the conflict between his responsibility for the brothers' safety, and his prohibition against rejecting a proffered feast (this indecision echoes the lack of insight displayed in his earlier conversation with Conchobor; as 1.3.1, above).¹⁶⁹ His sole protest to Borrach is that the dilemma in which the invitation has placed him is 'unfair', a remark more consistent with the complaint of a petulant adolescent than a seasoned warrior; he then

168 Fergus is not present at the time of the second vision, having remained behind to consume Borrach's feast.

169 As Breatnach observes (1994–5, 101), the refusal to consume food until they have reached Ulster is attributed, within LMU, to the *maic Uislenn*, whereas the G-text claims it is Fergus' own prohibition.

turns to Noísiu to ask his advice, an entreaty to which Deirdre, instead, responds (id., 112). Her reply suggests that she pays little heed to the gravity Fergus himself perceives in his current predicament; in her opinion, the safety of the *maic Uisnig*, which he has sworn to ensure, takes precedence. Although her concern for the brothers is unsurprising, her reply may also suggest that she harbours suspicions of the more than fortuitous timing of Borrach's request, and of the manner in which Borrach reiterates the invitation, even after he has been informed of Fergus' prior engagement to escort the brothers to Emain. It is possible, given the consistent misgivings concerning their return to Ireland to which she admits throughout the text, that she suspects some malign intervention behind this first obstacle to Fergus' sponsorship of the brothers. A similar surmise may be implied by Deirdre's comment that forsaking the brothers is a great price for a feast, as if Fergus' defection from the company were a foregone conclusion (ibid.). Fergus spends no further time in deliberation, but announces that to send his sons onwards with the company instead is not to forsake them. Although Noísiu ostensibly agrees to the compromise, he nevertheless departs the fortress in anger, exclaiming that he and his brothers have yet to be defended by anyone's hand except their own (ibid.). His display of irritation may suggest that, until this point, he was unaware of the true significance of Fergus' pledge, made before the departure from Scotland, that his guarantee would see them in safety to Emain. Following this realisation, Noísiu displays less patience than before with Deirdre's persistent attempts to divert the company from their journey.¹⁷⁰

After Fergus is left behind at Borrach's fortress, the sourness of his departure continues to inform Deirdre's attitude towards their return, colouring the advice she attempts to impart. Shortly after leaving Borrach's house, Deirdre urges Noísiu to direct the company somewhere other than Emain, until such time as Fergus has consumed his feast. When Illann complains that her misgivings impugn the ability of Fergus' sons to honour his word, she replies with a poem (id., 114) whose verses strengthen the insistence that his defection will be held responsible for all subsequent misfortunes which might befall the company (e.g. 'alas to have come [to Ireland] upon the word of Fergus the hasty son of Roig'; cf. 1.3.8, above, noting Bricriu's emphasis, later within G, upon the consequent damage to Fergus' own reputation). During her description of the second vision, Buinne's retention of his head when the other members of the company have been deprived of theirs, is not explicitly connected to Fergus' behaviour, but, when the truth of the vision is made manifest, i.e. at the time at which Buinne assures his survival by accepting Conchobor's bribe, Deirdre exclaims at once that this is a son who is like his father (id., 128). Fergus' acceptance of Borrach's feast is mentioned once more, prior to the company's arrival at

170 It is also worth noting that, by contrast with LMU, in which the *maic Uislenn* themselves request that Fergus should stand as their guarantor (ll.168–69), within G the choice results expressly from Conchobor's deception (as 1.3.1, above; cf. 1.3.10).

Emain, in association with Deirdre's suggestion that it would be better for the *maic Uisnig* to take quarter with Cú Chulainn in Dundalk, until such time as it has been consumed, and Fergus may rejoin them (id., 116).

Fergus' acceptance of the feast is not unique to the G-text, but occurs, albeit more simply, within the earlier tradition as well. Within LMU, Conchobor's role in effecting Fergus' desertion of the exiles' party is essentially the same, lacking only the precise detail of the person or persons with whom he conspires (LMU II.171–76). The attempt to compensate for his desertion of the exiles is also similar, with a son of Fergus' travelling onwards in his stead. Where the G-text differs, however, is in the author's insistence that Fergus – and, indirectly, Illann and Buinne, his sons – receives the greatest amount of blame for the tragedies that befall the exiles, and in the manner in which he is selected by Conchobor as the brothers' guarantor, upon the assumption that he will prove inadequate.¹⁷¹ From the moment that the suggestion of a guarantor being sent to accompany the *maic Uisnig* to Emain is raised, there is no indication within G that all three of the men named as candidates whose sureties the brothers would accept will go there together.¹⁷² Instead, Conchobor, having identified the only men whose sureties would be acceptable to the brothers, assesses the likelihood that their fulfilment of their oaths, in the event of a violation, would not also include assaulting him, even were he, personally, responsible for implementing the breach (id., 14–16). Both Cú Chulainn and Conall Cearnach reply that no man would be safe from them in the event of their surety being betrayed, whereas Fergus prefaces a similar assurance with the pledge, to Conchobor, 'I promise not to take your blood' (id., 16). It is evident, moreover, that despite this scene Fergus, as well as his sons, entertains no doubts concerning Conchobor's sincerity; each man will reiterate their trust in his word in response to Deirdre's successive misgivings, e.g. '[even] were the five great provinces of Ireland together, and of one mind, they would not be able to destroy that warranty' (id., 112; cf. id., 114).

Although it could be argued that G's fuller description of Conchobor's machinations – engineering the choice of guarantor, as well as ensuring, by manipulation, that a conflict of interest is presented to Fergus as soon as the company reaches Ireland – actually reduces the amount of blame for the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* that may be apportioned to Fergus himself, this does not satisfactorily explain the author's motivation for embellishing the scene to this extent. Given that it is extremely unlikely that the author of G did not have before him an earlier account of the association of the *maic Uisnig* with Conchobor and Deirdriu (cf. 1.4.1, below), it

171 Breatnach is not quite accurate to claim that Fergus “is portrayed in a favourable light” throughout LMU (1994–5, 100), when one of the most direct accusations levelled within Deirdriu's laments for the brothers' deaths exclaims that Fergus has committed trespass against them, and “sold his honour for ale” (LMU II.295–98).

172 Whereas, within LMU, Dubthach not only accompanies Fergus to Scotland as guarantor, along with the latter's son Fiachu, but also remains behind with him, when the rest of the party continues to Emain (LMU II.174–76).

appears to have been his intention to rework the much less detailed scene within, for example, LMU (ll.171–76, as above), in which the exiles' guarantor was unavoidably detained from accompanying them to Emain as he had promised. For the reasons explored at 3.2.2.6, above, it is likely that this guarantor had been associated, from the earliest version of this chain of events, with Fergus himself. It is also probable that another intention of an episode of this kind, so close to the beginning of the tale, must have been to emphasise the “Machiavellian” characterisation of Conchobor, whose intrigues, and exploitation of Fergus' weakness, will govern the greater majority of the narrative from this point on (cf. Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 15). The nature of his interaction with Fergus, however, throughout their initial conversation concerning the exiles, cannot fail to comment upon the latter's characterisation as well. Whereas the paucity of detail provided, within the comparable episode of LMU, allows Fergus little space in which to extricate himself from the conflict of interest represented by the invitation to dine, the reworking of that same scene within G provides ample space for such an attempt, yet the result is unaffected. Fergus' inability to recognise the underlying nature of Conchobor's apparent concern for the exiles' welfare, and similar reluctance to explore potential solutions to the dilemma in which he has been placed by Borrach, even with the room provided to do so, foreshadow the author's presentation of Fergus throughout the rest of the G-text – occupying, as we have seen, some twenty pages of the manuscript following the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* and Deirdre (as 1.1.1, above; cf. 1.3.8 and 1.3.9).

In light of these considerations, it is perfectly explicable, pace Breatnach (1994–5, 99–100), that so little detail is devoted either to Deirdre's origins, or to her initial departure from Ulster with the *maic Uisnig*. Hull's suggestion (1949, 1), that “the first part of the saga as related in [LMU] was simply too familiar to require recapitulation” for a subsequent audience, is based upon the underlying assumption that Deirdriu's depiction was of primary concern to the author of LMU. This suggestion is ultimately insupportable. It is equally undesirable, moreover, to assume, with Hull, that the supposed primacy of Deirdriu's character is maintained within the later tradition. What is apparent, is that the narrative progression of G, our earliest surviving example of this tradition, presupposes that not only was its author fully aware of the detail of a tale very similar to, if not identical with, LMU (as 1.4.1, below), but that his own text manipulates recognisable elements of the earlier tradition, in order that the divergent nature of G itself be emphasised. We have seen already how the exiles' vow to consume no food in Ireland until they should come to Emain is transferred, within G, onto Fergus mac Róich, and several other references to the characters' associations with each other, prior to the commencement of G's narrative, may also be identified. During the verses describing her vision of the cloud of blood above Emain, Deirdre expresses sorrow that such unprecedented discord has arisen between herself and Noísiu, referring to occasions from the couple's past when greater harmony was enjoyed (Mackinnon

1904–5, 118). One of her examples, a day upon which Noísiu brought her out “across Assaroe [i.e. Eas Ruaidh] of many oars”, appears to refer to a journey made before the pair left Ulster for Scotland, whose significance is not recalled by G itself. Other references, to episodes not expounded by any of the surviving sources, also occur within her laments for the brothers' deaths, as when Noísiu is reassured that Deirdre has retained no enmity for the “woman from Dún Treóin”, with whom he appears to have dallied at some stage during their exile (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 202 = RIA B iv 1). Of greater significance is the initial reference to the absence of the *maic Uisnig* from Conchobor's feast (Mackinnon 1904–5, 14). LMU describes the occasion upon which it is decided to dispatch envoys to recall the *maic Uislenn* to Emain, when word has reached Ulster of the brothers' current pursuit by the king of Scotland (LMU ll.160–70). The Ulstermen blame the crime of a “bad woman”, presumably Deirdriu, for the exiles' predicament, and suggest that it would be better for Conchobor to exercise lenience, and recall them to Ireland. Within G, the emphasis of this exchange is reversed, so that Conchobor, having carefully drawn the attention of his warriors to the brilliance of their household, disingenuously mentions the three sons of Uisnech as the only persons by whose additional presence it might be enhanced (Mackinnon 1904–5, 14). It is he, rather than the Ulstermen, who associates the brothers' absence with the interference of a woman, whilst the paucity of detail relating to this association suggests that an audience also familiar with a text similar to LMU, would equate the description with a version of the brothers' removal of Deirdre from her earlier predicament (as 3 2.3, above). The fact of this reversal, coupled with Conchobor's subsequent desire to ascertain whether or not Deirdre is as beautiful as she once was (see below), suggests that, in addition to emphasising the extent of Conchobor's deception of his warriors, the author of G is also drawing attention to a relationship between Conchobor and Deirdre, not necessarily attested within LMU itself (cf. 1.4.1, below).

As the author of LMU, in order to heighten the negativity of Conchobor's characterisation, utilised existing relationships between the king and several other Ulster Cycle characters within his own tale (as 3 2.3, above), so does the author of the G-text make use of existing traditions concerning an association between Conchobor, the *maic Uisnig*, Deirdre, and Fergus mac Róich. The negativity of Fergus' earliest reputation within the Ulster Cycle and the genealogies (Ó hUiginn 1993, 31–32), was partially addressed by the composition of LMU (cf. Carney 1983, 125–27; Ó Háinle 2008, 451; Ní Bhrolcháin 2009, 105), although, as suggested above (3 2.2.6), it is possible that an attempt of this kind, at odds with the majority of prevailing opinion, was not intended to be entirely persuasive, and was not accepted as such. The author of G, however, is unambiguous in his depiction of Fergus' weakness, vacillation, and compromised honour. Whilst it is probable that he was also aware of, and utilised, sources relating to Fergus' exile from Ulster other than LMU (as 1.3.8 and 1.3.9, above), the earlier author's introduction of reasons for this

departure, other than sexual peccadilloes (Ó hUiginn 1993, 34; cf. Hull 1930), doubtless established a useful precedent. The characters associated with this alternative version of events, therefore, i.e. Conchobor, the *maic Uisnig* and Deirdre, plus a brief allusion to the extent of their involvement with Fergus and his role in hastening their deaths, contribute effectively to the atmosphere of what is, in fact, a much more extensive tale concerning Fergus' exploits in Connacht, and his acquisition of Flidais, his future wife (Ó hUiginn 2006).¹⁷³ Given that it is Fergus' acceptance of responsibility for the safety of the *maic Uisnig* upon their return to Ulster, which dictates the tenor of his subsequent characterisation, it is perfectly sensible for G's author to have made only the briefest of references to events resulting in the exiled company's initial departure. The birth of Deirdre, and the inception of her relationship with the *maic Uisnig*, is essentially irrelevant to the current tale, and their absence is unsurprising. Nevertheless, as noted above, several sly, veiled references to the detail of existing accounts of the company's departure and return are made within G, e.g. the suggestion, raised by Conchobor rather than by the Ulstermen, that the exiles should be recalled.

Within G, therefore, Conchobor's association with Deirdre and the *maic Uisnig* is used by the author primarily as a means of emphasising Fergus' role in their betrayal and death. Deirdre's characterisation, effected largely through the medium of her visions and prophecies, serves to personify the author's intention to denigrate Fergus' behaviour throughout the text to the highest degree, and to establish his responsibility for accelerating events within the tale to their ultimate conclusion. This function has, I suggest, replaced her role within LMU (as 3 2.3, above). It has also been argued, however, that certain scenes within G display little interest in Fergus, and place much greater emphasis upon Conchobor's sexual interest in Deirdre, exemplified by the episode in which Leborcham is dispatched to report upon the state of her beauty since she was last observed in Ulster (Ó Háinle 2008, 453; as 1.3.6, above). Cathal Ó Háinle suggests that such emphasis upon Deirdre's appearance – and, presumably, upon her status as an object of desire – culminates in the description of her mourning for the deaths of the *maic Uisnig*, and the “carefully-crafted realisation of her character as anguished lover which is such a striking element of OCU” (ibid.). He speculates, furthermore, that the version of OCU represented by the G-text is “not the original version of this form of the tale”, and that an earlier version focused primarily upon Deirdre's characterisation as a femme fatale, whose negative influence led directly to the betrayal and death of the *maic Uisnig* at the jealous Conchobor's hands (ibid.). On these grounds, he proposes that the “original version of OCU” contained a description of Deirdre's birth. His statement of disbelief that “a late medieval author would have begun his tale at the point at which

173 As stated above, the present writer accepts Caoimhín Breatnach's argument (1994–5) that the text contained within the Glenmasan manuscript comprises a single composite tale, interrupted only by the missing bifolium; cf. Ó hUiginn 2006, 149.

the Glenmasan OCU begins” (ibid.) also implies, to the present writer, that either damage to G, or else a misapprehension by its author of his source material, has resulted in the text's current opening scene at Conchobor's feast, a suggestion Ó Háinle supports by pointing out that “many scribes of later copies of OCU felt the need to supply a version of the opening section” (id., 453–54).

It should be noted, initially, that this argument appears to be grounded upon an assumption of Deirdre's primacy not only within G, but also in any version of a narrative describing even a portion of her lifespan and association with the sons of Uisneach. Furthermore, whilst Ó Háinle is doubtless correct to assert that an “original version” of some of the events referred to by the G-text would have placed greater emphasis upon Deirdre's sexual allure, and to a conflict between Conchobor and a rival suitor for her possession, the present interpretation of Deirdre's characterisation within G (as above), and my conclusions concerning her depiction by the author of LMU (as 3 2.3), imply that this “original version” cannot be other than the *aithed*. There is, moreover, little reason to accept Ó Háinle's implicit suggestion that the OCU-text in G now lacks the account of Deirdre's birth and upbringing it once possessed (id., 453), when the condition of the manuscript provides no indication that its opening pages have been subject to loss or damage, similar to the kind responsible for the absent bifolium (as figure 1, above). The evidence adduced to support this argument, that later scribes consistently prefaced their version of events within the G-text with a description of Deirdre's birth and upbringing, fails to note that the majority of this 'prefatory' material was copied verbatim from Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn*, and merely reflects the swiftly-acquired authority of Keating's text, and its immense popularity from the moment of publication (cf. 1.3.10, above). In addition, Ó Háinle's statement that the sexual aspect of Deirdre's characterisation within G contributes to her depiction as an “anguished lover”, following the demise of the *maic Uisnig*, is itself open to doubt, given that, due to its textual lacuna, the G-text terminates prior to the description of the brothers' actual deaths.¹⁷⁴ Whilst the potentially comparable episode within RIA B iv 1 (as 1.3.9, above), in which Deirdre utters a series of verses over the brothers' graves, provides the most extensive indication of her long-term relationship with the three men (as 1.3.9, above), it is far from accurate to claim that “so much space and attention” is devoted, disproportionately, to this scene (Ó Háinle 2008, 453), when the description of the *maic Uisnig*, Deirdre, and their relationship in its entirety, comprises only 6 pages out of 51, the rest of which are entirely devoted to Fergus' exploits in consequence of his departure from Ulster. In the foregoing dialogue, moreover, prior to the brothers' deaths, in keeping with the understated description of their relations with each other within LMU (as 3 2.3,

174 It is also intriguing that, within RIA B iv 1, at the time of the brothers' deaths, the mourning Deirdre is said to have consumed blood from all three men, rather than from Noísiu alone (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 202; cf. 1.3.9, above).

above), there is little concentration within G upon the extent of the relationship between Deirdre and Noísiu, aside from her wistful recollection that greater harmony once existed between them. Throughout the course of the text, the pair are said to exchange neither affectionate remarks nor physical caresses – although they are twice described as playing chess together, an activity she does not engage in with anyone else (Mackinnon 1904–8, 104, 120) – and the greater part of their conversation consists of Deirdre's repeated offers of advice being rebuffed. Her concern for Noísiu's personal safety is also not greater than her concern for the safety of his brothers (e.g. 'I would give counsel to you, handsome sons of Uisneach' [id., 118]), and the verses spoken over the three men's graves are not noticeably more lavish in their praise of Noísiu's merits than those of Ainnle or Ardán (cf. Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 201–05 = RIA B iv 1).

Ó Háinle's underlying argument, however, for a tale similar in basic content to the events described by LMU and OCU, yet falling between the dates of their respective compositions, finds greater support elsewhere. It is clear, for example, that several manuscripts containing, for the most part, Ulster Cycle material – notably YBL and *Leabhar na hUidre* [LU] – were compiled in Connacht, the area with which, due to its extensive use of local toponymy, the version of TBF² reflected in G is most often associated (Ó hUiginn 2006, 150–51; cf. Aldridge 1961, 1962). Tomás Ó Concheanainn has also proposed (1980) that the adaptor of the earlier recension of *Táin Bó Flidais* (i.e. TBF¹, extant in LL and LU), may have been Giolla Íosa Mac Fhir Bhisigh, a native of Erris. Although Black (1987) suggests that G was initially compiled in Ireland, it is unclear whether Giolla Íosa (fl. 1380–1418) himself could have been its author; Ó Háinle's argument for an intervening version of the events described by the earliest pages of G is, to this extent, supported, although no such text appears to have survived. Several episodes within the text of G itself also suggest that other sources for the relationship between Deirdre and the *maic Uisnig*, besides LMU, were known to its author, and influenced the form of his narrative in this respect, and also regarding the exile from Ulster of Fergus mac Róich (as 1.4.1, below).

1.4.1: Conclusions; sources for Glenmasan

The assumption of Deirdre's primacy within G, as the earliest extant version of the post-LMU tradition, is unsupported by a close-reading of its surviving text. Her inclusion within the opening sections of its narrative, in connection with Conchobor and the *maic Uisnig*, and the manner in which the brothers' deaths are procured, suggests the ultimate usefulness of existing traditions concerning their relationship and demise to the author of G, whose overall purpose was the creation of a composite text, in which certain exploits of Fergus following his departure from Ulster were to be explored (cf. Breatnach 1994–5). The existence of a text similar to LMU, in which, (as 3 2.3, above), both Fergus' exile and Conchobor's abuses of his kingship, had already

been associated with an earlier *aithed* describing a relationship between Deirdriu and a rival suitor, proved convenient for the author of G, able to rework a narrative familiar to his own audience, whilst embellishing and subverting their expectations through his rearrangement of its characters. The 'white-washing' of Fergus' character, predominantly negative throughout the Ulster Cycle and associated genealogies, may have been deliberately unconvincing –certainly, this appears to be how Fergus' depiction within LMU has been understood by the author of G, whose own narrative emphasises only the dishonour and weakness inherent to his earlier portrayal. The fact that Fergus' role in facilitating the demise of the *maic Uisnig* is connected only to events following their return to Ulster probably constitutes a further reason for the commencement of G only after this return has been proposed, given that, within LMU itself, Fergus is unimportant to the narrative prior to this point.

The foregoing analysis of the contents of G, both before and after its textual lacuna, has identified a series of pre-existing sources likely to have influenced the composition of several aspects of the narrative, relating to G's depiction of Deirdre and the *maic Uisnig*, as well as of Conchobor and Fergus mac Róich. This material should be seen to include, in addition to LMU, *Fochunn Loingse Fergus mac Roig*, one or more of the fragmentary tales describing Conchobor's acquisition of the kingship of Ulster, and, most probably, *Aided Fhergusa* and other genealogical items relating to Fergus' death, or the legacies of his various children. The episodes within the latter part of G, describing Fergus' pursuit of the Gamhanraidh, and his acquisition of Ailill Finn's wife, are clearly indebted to the earlier recension of *Táin Bó Flidais*. Scattered references throughout the text also indicate the author's knowledge of traditions for which no further corroborating evidence appears to have survived, namely Deirdre's allusion to Noísiu's relationship with the daughter of the Earl of Dún Treóin. The possibility that the author's purpose in composing the narrative contained by G also included the desire to reconcile conflicting descriptions of certain episodes, is suggested at several points within the text which provide more than one possible version of events described – e.g. the length of Fergus' reign following his return to Ulster, or the identity of the person responsible for the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*. In addition, the influence of lost material, whose former existence is only inferable from certain aspects of G itself, should not be overlooked, namely the putative *aithed* also reflected within LMU (cf. 3 2.3, above). It is also possible that the composition of the opening episodes of G, concerning Deirdre and the *maic Uisnig*, was additionally informed by a tale developed independently from either LMU or the putative *aithed* during the intervening period, i.e. a 'lost' version of OCU itself (pace Ó Háinle 2008; cf. 1.4, above).

The composite nature of G has important implications for the interpretation of the development of Deirdre's character within the Ulster Cycle, which will be explored below.

Chapter Five

Conclusions: the evolution of Deirdriu

Synopsis

This chapter will outline: Deirdriu's evolution within the Ulster Cycle; a re-interpretation of *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and the later tradition; and a re-interpretation of Deirdriu's characterisation within all texts considered.

1.1: Introduction

The foregoing chapters have explored the wide range of primary sources concerned, in one form or another, with the depiction of Deirdriu,¹⁷⁵ and the way in which her character evolves gradually throughout the Ulster Cycle. Several problematic aspects of existing critical views upon the subject have been identified, as well as other areas of interest in need of further consideration. Foremost amongst the latter group is the desirability of a revised classification of the primary material itself, including familiar, well-represented items, such as LMU and the contents of G, but also items whose importance to the evolution of Deirdriu's characterisation has heretofore been overlooked, primarily because their content is accessible to us now only by discerning their influence upon surviving texts. Into this category falls the putative *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, as its structure has been proposed here, and, likewise, the form of OCU proposed by Cathal Ó Háinle, as an intervening stage between LMU and the narrative contained by G. Another aspect of this reclassification concerns the extent to which G, and also LMU itself, should be assessed as key witnesses in a complex process of development in the portrayal of Deirdriu from the Early Irish period to the Early Modern. Furthermore, it must be ascertained how each of the relevant texts is reflected in subsequent approaches to Deirdriu, from the work of Keating, to her depiction within the plays, poems, and novellas of the Irish Renaissance.

This concluding chapter will also reflect, en passant, upon the effectiveness of the various techniques of analysis applied within the present study, and speculate whether or not there are other areas of the discipline to which similar techniques might, in future, be applied. Some observations will also be made concerning implications for the assessment of other female characters depicted within the Ulster Cycle, including their impact upon the various narratives in which they are described.

175 As the earliest form in which any version of the character's name is extant, 'Deirdriu' will be employed throughout this concluding chapter, unless a specific manifestation of the character is intended, e.g. the name of the woman described, as Deirdre, within the Glenmasan manuscript.

1.2: The evolution of Deirdriu within the Ulster Cycle

The foregoing analysis of Deirdriu's depiction within the Ulster Cycle has identified the following series of textual strands, ranging from the Early Irish to the Early Modern period, from whose contents the development of her characterisation has been surmised:

- *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*;
- *Longes mac n-Uislenn*;
- *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*;
- X (+ Y and Z?), potential development/s of the *aithed* and/ or LMU (i.e. Ó Háinle's 'lost' OCU);
- The Glenmasan manuscript;
- 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach';
- OCU within RIA B iv 1.

The testimony of RIA B iv 1 has been given separate status, as the earliest complete version of events, post-LMU, describing Deirdriu's relationship with the *maic Uislenn* through to its conclusion, i.e. the brothers' deaths. The reference to Deirdriu and Noísiu, and their children, within the text of the *Bansenchus* (as 1 2.6, above), should, perhaps, be added to these items.

Regarding the *aithed*, which currently exists only as a title within Tale-List A and, putatively, within the so-called elopement scene of LMU, it has been proposed that its structure would have been comparable to the only other extant example of an *aithed*, namely *Aithed Bláthnait ingine Puill maic Fhidaig re Coin Culaind* [= *Aided Con Roí*], and that certain of the characteristics attributed to Bláthnait, and to her relationship with Cú Chulainn and Curói, may also, therefore, have been attributed to Deirdriu. The biographical information placed at the audience's disposal within *Aided Con Roí* is minimal, with only the bare statement of the parentage of Bláthnait, and the fact that, prior to her elopement with Cú Chulainn, she was married to the warrior Curói, being presented (as 3 2.3, above; cf. Best 1905, § 4). The primary characteristic of both of the men with whom Bláthnait is associated is their martial prowess, just as the valour and superior fighting skills possessed by the three *maic Uislenn* are emphasised throughout the Ulster Cycle, most commonly in texts from which reference to Deirdriu is absent (as 1 1.3, above). It is unlikely, therefore, that much more than the most basic information pertaining to Deirdriu's parentage, and initial encounter with at least one of the *maic Uislenn*, was provided within *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, as well as some form of obstacle to what would otherwise have been an uncontentious marriage following the eloping couple's initial meeting. The formulaic nature of Bláthnait's role within *Aided Con Roí*, in which she is little more than a device for

creating discord amongst the Ulster warriors, suggests that Deirdriu's initial association with the *maic Uislenn*, well-known elsewhere for their martial prowess, may have been contrived with similar intent, i.e. to implement some form of power-struggle amongst the men of Ulster (as 1.2, below). The dominant role embraced by Bláthnait, in arranging her husband's death, and her subsequent elopement with Cú Chulainn, parallels the assertiveness exhibited by Deirdriu during her first meeting with Noísiu, which is not otherwise consistent with the general passivity of her depiction within LMU. This suggests that the aggressive manner she assumes towards Noísiu within that text was borrowed from a comparable scene within the *aithed* (perhaps in order that, as has been proposed, the exiled party's departure for Scotland might be most naturally accomplished; as 3 2.3, above). Given the conclusion of *Aided Con Roí*, furthermore, it is unlikely that *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn* enjoyed a conventionally satisfactory ending. As with the unfulfilled union of Bláthnait and Cú Chulainn, Deirdriu and her lover probably enjoyed only a brief interlude together, before their relationship was curtailed by the intervention of a third party. As a parallel to the intervention of those loyal to Bláthnait's former guardian within *Aided Con Roí*, the couple are likely to have been pursued by the party whose prior association with Deirdriu constituted an obstacle to union with another party being formed. That this obstacle within the *aithed* was Conchobor himself, and that his conduct in bringing about the sundering of Deirdriu from her lover, and their probable deaths in consequence, was conducted with some dishonour, is suggested by the function which the sundering of their union fulfils within LMU itself, in which it contributes to the cumulative exposition of Conchobor's misdeeds and abuses of his kingship, alongside the inclusion of characters, such as Fergus and Eogan mac Durthacht, with whom he has formerly experienced conflict (as 3 2.3, above).

It has been proposed, therefore, that Deirdriu's effective role within LMU is arranged as a means of denigrating Conchobor, and that her association with the *maic Uislenn*, imported from the existing *aithed*, constitutes only one amongst a number of references designed to emphasise the king's unfitness to rule. The centrality of their role within LMU's narrative, and the apparent ease with which aspects of the former narrative have been integrated, suggests that the *aithed* may not have been a popular or widely-disseminated tale. Far from embodying the assertive, autonomous role argued for her by a wide range of critics (as 1 4.3, above), the present analysis of Deirdriu's decisions, her speech, and the manner in which her death occurs, testifies to an actual lack of independence, and suggests, instead, that by means of the five actions she performs which alter the course of the subsequent narrative (as 3 2.3, above), particular aspects of Conchobor's kingship are questioned and, ultimately, found wanting. This process is continued within *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*, in which Conchobor's relationship with the only woman in Ulster deemed the equal of Deirdriu, is expressed through the reversal of each negative action previously inflicted by him upon those persons with whom he associates throughout LMU (as 3

2.4, above).

Examination of the behaviour attributed to Fergus mac Róich within LMU, also raises several questions with regard to the traditional interpretation of his presence within the text. If LMU was constructed primarily as a vehicle for Fergus' glorification, in an attempt to override his previous reputation for dishonourable conduct and sexual excess (cf. Carney 1983), it is curious that the alleged attempt occupies such a small proportion of the text itself, in which the majority of episodes are devoted to the denigration of Conchobor. It is possible to argue that the only aspect of the narrative obviously concerned with the exploration of Fergus' role, i.e. the description of his failure to safeguard the *maic Uislenn* upon their return to Ulster, may itself have been borrowed from a text whose construction did indeed reflect the purpose suggested by Carney for LMU. The scant evidence for the existence of such a tale, however, is greatly outweighed by the variety of extant sources in which Fergus' portrayal is far less sympathetic. An aspect of the same episode that would appear to have been overlooked thus far, is the fact that Fergus' abandonment of the *maic Uislenn* is orchestrated by Conchobor, in an act which provides a further illustration of his unfitness to rule, and serves only incidentally to depict Fergus' departure from the province as being free from the taint of sexual dishonour (reasserted within G; as 4 1.3.8, above). At the same time, Fergus' presence within LMU, in whatever capacity, is consistent with the presence of Cathbad, Sencha mac Ailella, and Eogan mac Durthacht, each of whom is portrayed elsewhere as being at loggerheads with Conchobor.

Deirdriu's characterisation within LMU is otherwise unconnected to that of Fergus. His association within that text, however, with Conchobor's response to the exiles' departure from Ulster, sets a precedent subsequently utilised by the author of G. In other words, Fergus' neglect of his role as guarantor is attested within G as only one aspect of his generally dishonourable conduct, other examples of which are adapted, as we have seen, from *Fochunn Loingse Fergusa maic Roich*, and the earlier recension of *Táin Bó Flidais* (as 4 1.4.1, above). The author's exploitation of Fergus' previous relationship to Conchobor and the exiles also appears to have reminded him of Deirdriu's role, within LMU, as a catalyst for the gradual revelation of Conchobor's abuse of his *fír*. The role fulfilled by Deirdre,¹⁷⁶ within G, in both her speeches and prophetic visions, foreshadows the successive occasions upon which Fergus responds inappropriately to a test of his qualities as a leader or warrior, directing the attention of the audience towards these occasions even before they occur.

Within the episode which describes Conchobor's desire to ascertain whether or not Deirdre has retained the beauty he remembers, the suggestion that yet another version of their relationship,

¹⁷⁶ See note 175, above.

formerly described elsewhere, is reflected within G, is eminently plausible (cf. Ó Háinle 2008, e.g. 451). Ó Háinle's argument for a 'lost' version of OCU falters, however, through his conviction that portraying Deirdriu within both the extant text, as well as the lost one, was the principal concern of the authors (cf. 4 1.4, above). His interpretation of Deirdre as an “anguished lover”, moreover, is largely dependent upon the description of her behaviour in the wake of the brothers' deaths, an episode absent from G itself due to the textual lacuna.

The suggestion that certain episodes within G, such as Leborcham's attempt to persuade Conchobor that Deirdre's beauty has forsaken her, may reflect the influence of other texts, is more persuasive once the notion of the girl's obligatory primacy within such narratives has been eschewed. Even the *aithed*, in the form in which it has been proposed, need not have focused upon the characterisation of Deirdriu to the exclusion of the surrounding actants; for, within the arguably comparable *Aided Con Roí*, other characters are described at greater length than Bláthnait herself. Even the exploration of an overtly sexual connection between Deirdriu and one of the *maic Uislenn*, or, more likely, between Deirdriu and Conchobor, need not have been more important to the progression of the proposed narrative than as a facet of the conflict between her rival suitors. Conchobor's request, within G, to be informed, in the period following her sojourn with his rival, whether or not Deirdre has retained her former beauty, would also be eminently suited to a narrative in which the girl's possession signified greater benefits to the successful claimant than physical pleasure, but where the retention of her beauty, evidently symbolic of those benefits, would also signify the rival claimant's continued enjoyment of them.¹⁷⁷ This is implied, most notably, by the fact that Conchobor's desire to visit harm upon the *maic Uislenn* is temporarily assuaged when Leborcham declares Deirdre's beauty to have been lost, and, perhaps, by Noísiu's attempt to destroy the person other than Leborcham, i.e. Trendorn, who is sent by Conchobor to spy upon Craobhruadh and report back (as 4 1.3.6, above).

Ó Háinle's argument for rejecting the alleged primacy of Fergus' character within G, in favour of Deirdre's, depends mainly upon the imbuing of Conchobor's interest in Deirdre's appearance with greater weight than its actual, limited presence within the narrative supports. It is more likely to indicate the author's reference to another version of a relationship involving Deirdre, Conchobor and a third party, one more similar, in fact, to the one proposed for the structure of the *aithed*, or perhaps an independent development of it. A tale of this kind may well have been extant prior to the time that G was compiled, but to suggest that it was used by that manuscript's author, or, indeed, that he used either *Fochunn Loingse Fergus maic Roich* or *Táin Bó Flidais*, need not

177 A similar sentiment is implied by Conchobor's decree, within LMU, that Deirdriu must be raised in a place apart from the rest of his court until such time as she is of an age to become 'the woman in his company' (ll.82–83), suggesting that, excepting Conchobor, no other man should look upon her beauty, or enjoy the potential advantages which its possession might bestow; cf. 1.2, below.

imply, as Ó Háinle has done, that G lacks a description of Deirdre's birth and upbringing that it originally contained. Within the body of Keating's 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach', each of Deirdriu's actions which have retained some sense of their former significance is also recast, emphasising, for example, that Deirdriu's initial conversation with Noísiu was predicated by the awakening of romantic love. Moreover, whilst Fergus' devastating behaviour, in the wake of the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, serves to underline one aspect of the enduring conflict between Ulster and Connacht, his decision to abandon the *maic Uislenn*, and to forsake his pledges for their safety, is denuded of its previous significance beneath Conchobor's deliberate contriving of the brothers' deaths.

The gradual evolution of Deirdriu's association with Conchobor, and her impact upon Ulster, may also be viewed in her death-scene. Within *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, in the form in which it has been proposed, it is possible that Deirdriu's death resulted from a series of events similar to those which kill off Bláthnait at the conclusion of *Aided Con Roí*, when, in recompense for her complicity in Curói's death, she is pursued by the men of Ulster and assaulted by Curói's poet, Ferchertne, who grasps her in arms, crushing her ribs, before throwing her over a cliff (Best 1905, §13). Were it the case, comparably, that *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn* involved an attempt upon Conchobor's own life, in which Deirdriu was complicit, this might explain, in part, why her character was chosen as the focus of Conchobor's misdeeds within LMU. Within LMU itself, however, whilst Deirdriu's death retains the distinction of commenting upon the events from which it results, the description of those events is not also imbued with the layers of deliberate intention by which Bláthnait's demise is surrounded. It has been proposed that Deirdriu's death is accidental, the unforeseen consequence of her leap from Eogan mac Durthacht's chariot. The attempt to escape itself, however, encapsulated by the act of leaping, signifies the culmination of Conchobor's decision to transfer the woman whose affection he has failed to secure, to the custody of another man, one whom she has equal cause to dislike, in an act which cannot be other than vindictively motivated (as 3 2.2.7, above). Her death, accidental or not, also indicates the ultimate failure of the relationship which Conchobor had attempted to form, and the failure of this relationship either to perpetuate itself, or to advance the physical legacy of either party. Deirdriu, at least within LMU, dies childless, and the beauty which signified the advantages that might accrue to her current possessor is also destroyed. Conchobor, in a reflection of the most telling indication of rottenness in the reigns of both Rónán of Leinster and Muirchertach mac Erca (Ní Dhonnchadha 1964, e.g. ll. 15–20, 309; cf. Bhreathnach 1982, 248–49), is not exposed to physical harm by the abuse of his sovereignty, but, through the series of poor decisions described within LMU to this point, implements Deirdriu's destruction, thus removing the possibility of any further advantage being enjoyed, either by another party but also, ultimately, by himself.

The manner in which Deirdre's death was once described by G, however, remains elusive. It may have reflected a further dependence of the author upon the testimony of *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, as it has been proposed, or upon LMU, but the relatively slight influence of events within that text, aside from the return of the *maic Uisnig* to Ulster and Fergus' carelessness regarding their safety, renders this unlikely. The remaining text of G, moreover, indicates that the events culminating in the brothers' deaths differed notably different from the comparable episodes within LMU, even before the lacuna occurs. The brothers are not assaulted unawares, immediately following their arrival at Emain, but are greeted by Conchobor, given quarter at Craobhruadh, and engage in conversation with Leborcham before the assault upon the fortress even begins. They also have the opportunity to mount a defence. Their actual deaths, of course, are not described – the only property of the following narrative from which the manner of their demise may possibly be inferred, is the series of seemingly retaliatory acts committed against Eogan mac Durthacht and his daughters. On the other hand, Eogan's involvement in the brothers' deaths is absent, even in retrospect, from RIA B iv 1, the earliest extant description of their demise since LMU. In RIA B iv 1 it is Maine, son of the king of Lochlann, who volunteers to act as executioner when the rest of the Ulstermen have refused, after the siege of Craobhruadh has been broken only by the intervention of Cathbad at Conchobor's request. The *maic Uislenn* also engage in discussion concerning which of them should be the first to die. None of these circumstances finds any counterpart within LMU, or any other extant text of earlier date.¹⁷⁸ RIA B iv 1 also describes Deirdre's death, only a short time after the brothers', in the first surviving description to differ from the detail of LMU. It is also the first occasion upon which Deirdre displays the acts characteristic of a mourning woman, for which she will later, somewhat ironically, become synonymous (as 4 1.3.9, above; cf. Mathis 2008).¹⁷⁹

It is possible that the course of events within RIA B iv 1 directly reflects the influence of G, and that the brothers and Deirdre perished, within G, in a largely similar way. One element supportive of this suggestion is the fact that the brothers' death-scene within RIA B iv 1, completed, according to its colophon, in 1671, takes no account of 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach', in which Keating's description of the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* and Deirdriu is

178 With the exception of Maine's involvement in *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*; see below.

179 It is possible, however, that, were the description of Deirdre's death within G actually the first of its kind, i.e. dissimilar to her death within LMU, G's author was also familiar with Continental material in which the death of a notable female character was usually attended with greater pathos than bloodshed. The formula employed within RIA B iv 1, following Deirdre's eventual passing (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 205), is also markedly similar to the description of the manner in which the deaths of Diarmaid and Gráinne are marked within *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne: 7 ro tógbhadh a líaa ós a leachta 7 do sgriobhadh a n-anmanna oghuim innta 7 ro fearadh a gcluitheadha caointe ina gceathrar*, 'and their stones were raised above their graves, and their names were written upon them in ogham, and their funeral games were held (for them) as a foursome'. Some of the more creative details attached to the quartet's burial, such as the refusal of Deirdre's corpse to remain separate from Nóisiu's, or the motif of the planted trees intertwining above their twin graves, appear to belong to a later period of redaction (cf. the conclusion of Adv. Lib. 72.2.6 [= NLS 56], utilised by Stokes in an attempt to solve the problem of G's 'lost ending'; as 4 1.2, above).

clearly based upon the detail of LMU (cf. Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 57–58). If the testimony of RIA B iv 1 was not the innovation of its author, then its own detail must reflect either the account now lacking from G or, perhaps, that of an intervening tale or tales, independent developments from the *aithed* or, perhaps, from another version of LMU, from which some of the cohesiveness of the extant narrative had been lost. In this regard, it should also be recalled that within *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne* it is Maine, the king of Lochlann's son, who is held responsible for the deaths of the *maic Uislenn*, despite the fact that so much of the narrative within the rest of the tale is clearly dependent upon LMU (as 3 2.4, above). The author of TLA adds that Maine was willing to undertake the role of executioner because Noísiu had been responsible for the deaths of his father and brothers whilst the *maic Uislenn* were in exile in Scotland, but that, in fulfilling this role, Maine was acting as the deputy of Eogan mac Durthacht (Breatnach 1980, ll.170–77). It is possible that this harmonization of Eogan's and Maine's conflicting roles was also a feature of G, accounting for the reference, in the latter half of the manuscript, to the revenge exacted against Eogan and his daughters. Maine's death may also have been described, although it is another notable feature of RIA B iv 1 that Cú Chulainn, having enquired upon two separate occasions as to the identity of Noísiu's killer, fails to act upon Deirdre's response, and, it must be assumed, “quietly returns to Dundalk”, without first ensuring that Maine will also suffer for his involvement in the brothers' deaths (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 59).¹⁸⁰

Were it the case, therefore, that the deaths of the *maic Uisnig* and Deirdre occurred, within G, in the manner in which they are also described by RIA B iv 1, it is a comment upon the strength of both threads of narrative that, whilst 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach' follows the detail of LMU, its popularity does not appear to have precluded subsequent authors, reworking the theme of Deirdriu's association with the *maic Uislenn*, from continuing to refer to sources other than those utilised by Keating. Mac Giolla Léith suggests that the apparent co-existence of at least two divergent strands of narrative, one in which the *maic Uislenn* are killed by Eogan mac Durthacht, exemplified by LMU and, later, by Keating, and one in which they are killed by Maine, indicates the existence of a separate Scottish tradition concerning the exile of the *maic Uislenn* within that country (1993, 17–19). This hypothesis is supported by the additional references within TLA and the *Bansenchus* to the children of Deirdriu and Noísiu, born in Scotland and raised there following their parents' return to Ulster (as 3 2.4, above). What remains unclear, however, is whether or not this Scottish thread was the innovation of the author of G himself, elaborating upon minimal detail provided by LMU and TLA, or an independent tradition utilised by G's

180 Mac Giolla Léith speculates, accordingly (1993, 59), that the original ending of G must have contained a description of Maine's death, although he concedes it is possible that the lack of appropriate revenge specified within RIA B iv 1 was felt by subsequent redactors, and therefore inserted. It is one of the few plausible proposals contained in his reconstruction of the 'lost ending of OCU' (as 4 1.2, above).

author alongside his “extensive use of Argyllshire placenames” (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 19; cf. 2.2, below).

Deirdriu's evolution within the Ulster Cycle, as delineated by descriptions of her birth and death, and by her association with Conchobor, Fergus mac Róich, and the *maic Uislenn*, may therefore be divided into six – or, perhaps, seven¹⁸¹ – distinct, but interrelated, narrative strands:

1. *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, as reconstructed above, in which Deirdriu's presence denotes some form of power struggle between two or more claimants (as 3 2.3, above), and her independent presence is minimal, but inherently disruptive;
2. LMU, in which this disruptiveness has been refined to foster the gradual exposition of Conchobor's general unfitness to rule, only one aspect of which relates to his attempts to possess Deirdriu;
- [2.5. *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*, a singular response to LMU (as 3 2.4, above)];
3. The Glenmasan manuscript: dissimilar to 2, concerning characters alike in name only, but its author's characterisation of certain of those characters, notably Fergus mac Róich and Deirdre, retains at least some of its former direction (i.e. Deirdre's impact upon the structure of the narrative is directed towards the exposure of Fergus rather than Conchobor);
4. 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach', directly descended from strands 2 and 3, with potential influence of 1;
5. 'Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach' within RIA B iv 1, descended from strand 3, but influenced by 4 in its altered focus upon the central portrayal of Deirdre and the *maic Uisnig*;
6. The plays, novels and poems of the Irish Renaissance, almost all directly descended from strand 4, but with elements borrowed indiscriminately from 2 and 3 (e.g. death-scenes of varying description), as well as fragments already compiled, e.g. by O'Curry (as 1 1.1.6, above).

2: Critical reassessments

It has been suggested throughout the foregoing analysis that there are fundamental differences between the portrayal and use of Deirdriu's character within the earlier tradition, and the later, but that this divergence does not necessarily encompass a difference in the understanding of her basic function to the structure of the respective narratives by which she is defined. In other words, each

¹⁸¹ The seventh strand is represented by *Tochmarc Luaine ocus Aided Athairne*, indicated by '2.5' in the above classification.

of her appearances within the extant Cycle (i.e. excluding the lost *aithed*) embody the role of the *adjutant*, or helper, whose depiction is not independent, but assists with the depiction of another character, or in the arrangement of another aspect of the overall narrative. This position as *adjutant* diverges considerably from previous critics' assessments of Deirdriu's perceived importance as protagonist, not merely within LMU, but within each narrative strand by which she is defined, whether as tragic victim or passionate romantic heroine (as 1 4.3, above). It is the contention of this thesis, however, that neither of these assessments is supported by the extant canon of material in which Deirdriu is described, at least until Keating's version of her biography, although it is probable that either, or both, of these roles may have been attested within earlier, non-extant, items (notably the structure of the *aithed*, as it has been proposed at 3 2.3, above).

Some other, more basic, characteristics, however, may be discerned throughout the canon. Deirdriu is female; she is depicted solely within the context of her association with the *maic Uislenn*, with Conchobor and with his Ulster court; her behaviour, objectively, is viewed as problematic, and the mere fact of her existence is a cause for distress. Her impact upon the narratives in which she is depicted is consistently negative: she brings resentment, dishonour and, ultimately, destruction, upon both person and property. What is also evident is that none of the persons with whom she is associated enjoy a similar uniqueness, but are depicted elsewhere within the Ulster Cycle in contexts which have nothing to do with Deirdriu. Her presence, however, appears to ensure that any negativity associated with those contexts is magnified, so much so that, as has been proposed, her principal function within LMU appears to be to personify Conchobor's poor judgement and abuse of his *fír* throughout the rest of the Ulster Cycle. This emblematic role is also present in G, though applied to the denigration of Fergus mac Róich rather than Conchobor. It is only Keating's version of her persona which returns, perhaps, to the more positive – and personalised – characterisation formerly displayed by the *aithed*. The popularity of Deirdriu within 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach', personifying compromised romance and unavoidable tragedy, is apparent to the extent that her importance as an autonomous character within the earlier sources, notably LMU, has since been overestimated.

Several of the strands identified by the foregoing analysis have already been subject to a variety of critical interpretations. In light of the present reconsideration of LMU, G, and the general characterisation of Deirdriu, Conchobor and the *maic Uislenn*, throughout the series of texts in which their association with each other is explored, it is appropriate to consider whether or not these textual assessments themselves require re-examination.

2.1 Re-reading *Longes mac n-Uislenn*

Critical interpretations of LMU, and of Deirdriu's characterisation within that text, have traditionally focused upon the elements of the sovereign relationship presumed to lurk beneath its surface, and of the role played by Deirdriu as a means of fostering tension between Noísiu and Conchobor, rivals for the kingship of Ulster (as 1 4.3.1 and 3 2.2.1, above). Deirdriu, whether or not she is assumed to have retained the aura of a *flaithius* – i.e. whether her former supernatural nature is held to have been subsumed beneath her “human skin” (Findon 1997, 1) – is read as the symbol of this sovereign relationship, and her behaviour throughout the text is seen to assist in the creation of tension between the rival claimants for her affection, and the material advantages which this affection may bestow. There are several immediate difficulties with these suppositions. Firstly, Deirdriu, whose life commences and is brought to a conclusion within the course of the text, does not exhibit supernatural characteristics, and, with the exception of the fact that a name is bestowed upon her during the text, which may also be indicative of her function within it (cf. Wynn 1990, 129), does not possess any of the attributes associated with a sovereignty figure like Becuma (McCone 1990, 108–09), or Niall Nóigíallach's hag (Cross and Slover 1969, 512). Interpretations of the episode most often alleged to reflect this status, in which she approaches Noísiu and engages in the conversation which results in their departure from Ireland, have also tended to overlook two important factors which ultimately count against arguments for Deirdriu's sovereignty. Whilst the language of the farmyard, utilised by both parties during this conversation, evinces a clear sense of the comparison of status, as well as the exchange of animals (as 3 2.2.3, above), this language is introduced by Noísiu, not by Deirdriu, with his comment that ‘it is a fine heifer that goes past me’. Deirdriu's responses evoke similar associations, but these probably arise because, with her limited knowledge of ordinary verbal intercourse, she is unaware of both their suggestive connotations, and the fact that this is not a usual method of communication. Second, and more significantly, Deirdriu's behaviour during this scene is incongruous, given her behaviour throughout the rest of the text, suggesting the possibility that the episode may reflect the influence upon it of an existing exchange between Deirdriu and Noísiu – or, at least, between Deirdriu and one of the three *maic Uislenn* – within an earlier version of similar events. It has been suggested, within the foregoing analysis of LMU, not only that this scene reflects the influence of the no-longer-extant *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, but that Deirdriu's behaviour during the scene may reflect an autonomy of character otherwise absent from LMU, formerly present within the *aithed* itself (as 3 2.3, above). Accordingly, it has been proposed that the content and textual structure of the *aithed* may have denoted the triangular, sovereign relationship between the *flaithius*, i.e. Deirdriu, and at least two rival claimants for her possession, which LMU retains only within its third episode, the borrowed scene in which Deirdriu and Noísiu first meet.

The present analysis of the content of LMU is ultimately unable to support the suggestion that Deirdriu's association with Conchobor and Noísiu constitutes a sovereign relationship. To Deirdriu's lack of supernatural attributes must be added the fact that her alleged ability to bestow power neither results in the accession of a new ruler, nor effects any transfer of land or status to any of the *maic Uislenn*. The brothers' former status, as feted warriors of the Ulster court, is also diminished by their exile from their native land. Deirdriu's death, moreover, lacks the significance it would have possessed, had Deirdriu, as a creature of sovereignty, abandoned her native land and 'ended as a suicide' (Tymoczko 1985–6, 158). It does not, however, imply a deliberate attempt to evade responsibility for failing to effect the transfer of power to a more appropriate ruler, akin to the suicide of Echaid's daughter within *Fingal Rónáin*. Rather, somewhat ironically, it confirms the ultimate unfitness of the current incumbent to retain the lordship which he does, in fact, retain, even after the conclusion of the tale. Conchobor's retention of the kingship of Ulster suggests that Deirdriu's function within LMU does not amount to that of the death-goddess, or anti-*flaithius*, defined by Máire Bhreathnach (1982, 245), whose presence ought to provoke the downfall, and occasional death, of an unjust king, at such time as 'the union between [the king] and his realm has been irreparably damaged by his actions' (this tenuous union is addressed, instead, within TLA; as 3 2.4, above).

The designation of LMU as a tale concerned with kingship, and a monarch's successful maintenance of that kingship, need not necessarily depend upon the identification of Deirdriu as a figure of sovereignty. The exploration of Conchobor's fitness to rule is central to the structure of the text. Although his nominal status as ruler of Ulster is unaffected by his behaviour throughout the text, each episode in which he participates culminates in the exposure, through his relationship to Deirdriu, of successive aspects of his misjudgement and abuses of his *fír* (as 3 2.3, above). The fact that these abuses were deemed by later commentators to amount to an unfitness to retain his rule is evident from, for example, the composition of TLA, and from the opening scene of the second recension of *Táin Bó Flidais*, in which Fergus mac Róich is said to have replaced Conchobor in the kingship of Ulster following the latter's banishment. Conchobor's exile appears to have resulted from an episode similar to the conclusion of the OCU-text within RIA B iv 1, when he is cursed by Cathbad in consequence of his betrayal of the sureties for the safety of the *maic Uisnig* (as 4 1.3.9, above). It cannot be insignificant that greater condemnation of Conchobor's actions is reserved for his recklessness in matters of honour and breach of contract with regard to the brothers' deaths, than in his behaviour towards Deirdriu, or his failure to maintain the health of their relationship. Were she, in fact, held to be symbolic of his sovereignty, this omission would be surprising. Conchobor's lordship over the Ulstermen also clearly pre-dates his acquaintance with Deirdriu, and his initial entitlement to wield power is not dependent upon any claims to sovereignty she might otherwise have bestowed (cf. Herbert

Conversely, the present textual analysis of LMU suggests that the gradual exposure of Conchobor's abuses of his *fír* and, hence, his unsuitability to rule Ulster, is inextricably linked throughout the tale to his relationship with Deirdriu. Rather than his sovereignty per se, she represents the personification of his unfitness to retain it. That this is not the same conceptual relationship as the one which may exist between an unjust king and a 'goddess of death', is evident from the fact that Conchobor's kingship, with the exception of the damage caused to his fortress by Fergus and Dubthach (LMU II.198–99), is unchallenged by the conclusion of the tale. It is significant, however, that the first occasion upon which Conchobor, within LMU, is presented with a choice between two possible courses of action, and pursues the less judicious option, coincides with the first appearance of Deirdriu. This choice follows her birth, the dire predictions concerning her future impact upon Ulster, and Conchobor's overruling of his warriors' wish to destroy the child and assuage her threat to the continued safety of their province. Conchobor's decision also establishes his responsibility for the girl's future, when, as the 'woman in his company' (LMU II.82–83), her relationship to him will be regulated by the same expectations as those which govern more conventionally-formed alliances – e.g. that the woman, presumably, will bear children, safeguarding the continuation of their father's line. A successful union should ensure future prosperity and fruitfulness, rather than the dishonour, destruction and death which follows Conchobor's decision to form even the most tenuous of alliances, with a woman whose introduction to the life of his court is so singularly unpropitious. Within LMU, therefore, the cautionary element within the tale would appear to warn against the formation of unwise unions. The example provided is of a union, between Conchobor and Deirdriu, whose inception is accompanied by self-interest and arrogance, rather than the transcendence of self ordinarily demanded by someone of Conchobor's status, whose personal relationships ought not to be formed in a way which imperils the safety of their province (Herbert 1992a, 55). Instead of the fertility, stability, and material advantage, which ought properly to result from a well-chosen, properly negotiated alliance – such as the one Conchobor will later, ironically, attempt to form with Lúaine (TLA II.130–31) – Conchobor's court erupts into dissension, three of his most renowned warriors are driven into exile, several hundred of his subjects are murdered, his fortress is burned, and a further cohort of the Ulstermen, choosing loyalty to Fergus mac Róich rather than to their nominal overlord, depart for Connacht, from where they will spend sixteen years making raids against Ulster, before waging war upon the province in alliance with Ailill and Medb during *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. Each of these circumstances is facilitated by Conchobor's poor judgement, pride and abuse of his *fír*, and is revealed, within successive episodes of LMU, as a particular facet of his association with Deirdriu, who may justly be termed the personification of those abuses.

2.2 Re-reading the later tradition

The foregoing analysis of G, alongside 'OCU', the later recension of *Táin Bó Flidais* within RIA B iv 1, and Keating's 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach', has demonstrated that the depiction of Deirdre within the post-LMU tradition is inseparable from the context of the material by which her character, and characterisation within those texts, is defined. This context is conditioned by the respective authors' awareness, and manipulation, of existing material, and their construction of new strands of narrative which, with the exception of basic characteristics common to the shared actants, bear little resemblance to the structure of LMU, or to the arrangement of those characters upon whose behaviour the progression of its narrative depends. Within G, for example, whilst Conchobor's character retains the overriding element of dishonour for which it is also conspicuous within LMU, Deirdre, with the exception of her basic relationship to the *maic Uisnig*, displays few similarities to the Deirdriu of the earlier tale (as 4 1.4, above). Her passivity, and lack of contribution to the dialogue within LMU, is replaced by the decisive manner in which Deirdre, within G, attempts to safeguard the lives of the *maic Uisnig*, repeatedly urging the brothers not to return to Ulster or pay heed to Conchobor's assurances of reconciliation. At the same time, Deirdre's desire to protect her companions repeatedly focuses attention upon a greater threat to their well-being, the vacillation and compromised honour of Fergus mac Róich.

This denigration of Fergus' character is pursued within each episode of G, not only within those scenes which also describe the return of the *maic Uisnig* to Ulster. It continues after Fergus has received word of their betrayal, temporarily resumed his reign in Ulster, experienced the humiliation of this lordship at the hands of the three foreign warriors (as 4 1.3.7, above), taken refuge in Connacht, in the hope of gaining the material wealth promised to the rest of the *Dubloinges*, and engaged in the ultimately futile pursuit of Flidais and her cow (cf. Ó hUiginn 2006). The description of his association with the *maic Uisnig*, and the betrayal of his guarantees for their safety, is only one facet of this process. Its inclusion within the manuscript is consistent with the principles of construction apparent throughout the rest of G, in which references to other episodes depicting Fergus in a poor light proliferate. These episodes may be identified within earlier sources, clearly influential to the text's composition, namely *Fochunn Loingse Fergus mac Roich*, *Aided Fhergusa*, and the first recension of *Táin Bó Flidais*. There is also a suggestion that the construction of other characters within G, apart from Fergus, was informed by a similar process – principally, Conchobor's attempts to ascertain whether or not Deirdre has retained her former beauty may reflect an element formerly present within the *aithed* (as 1.2, above). This material, however, is only loosely interwoven with the central thread of the text. The text of G is a composite structure, whose main concern is to reveal Fergus' innate lack of honour and martial integrity, which it pursues much further than LMU (as 3 2.2.6, above). This remarkable focus,

alongside its author's intricate manipulation of material that would appear to have been taken from both Irish and Scottish traditions, suggests that G should be regarded as a text unique to the period of its composition. Despite their relative unimportance within G, it is Deirdre and the *maic Uisnig* who, largely in consequence of Geoffrey Keating's portrayal of their relationship, become the protagonists of the fifth narrative strand identified above, with its new focus upon the foregrounded portrayal of Deirdre and the three brothers within 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach' (as 1.2, above).

Following the identification of these three distinct strands of narrative within the later medieval period, the collective title, *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*, by which this material is most commonly known, should be reassessed. Mac Giolla Léith adopts the title *Aoidhe Chloinne Uislenn* for the contents of RIA B iv 1 (1993, 186), which properly represents only the description of this portion of the manuscript within the Royal Irish Academy's catalogue of its holdings (cf. Breatnach 1994–5, 214). The colophon of the text reads: *conadh í oidhe 7 feall Cloinni hUisneach go nuige sin*, 'and this is the death and treachery (practised upon) the children of Uisnech thus far' (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 205), suggesting that, for the author of this particular version, the description of the brothers' murder was the salient moment of the text. RIA B iv 1 was written in 1671, but displays no influence of Keating's 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach' from FFE (id., 30). Deirdre meets her death in the grave of the three brothers, not by falling from Conchobor's chariot. The next-oldest extant copy currently referred to as 'OCU', however, contains the introductory episode from Keating's version, describing Deirdriu's birth and Cathbad's prophecy concerning her, and replaces the description of her death in the brothers' grave with the fall from the chariot (id., 30–31). This version was completed by 1703. Following Keating's epilogue, its colophon reads, *go ndearnadh míre mion-bhrúitte dhá ceann, gur ling a hinchinn go hobann eiste. Gonadh amhlaidh sin táinig díbert Fhearghusa mheic Róigh 7 Chormaic Con-Loinges mheic Chonchubhair 7 Dubhthaigh Daol Uladh, 7 bás Deirdre*, 'and finely-ground fragments were made of her head [following its contact with the stone], so that her brains burst immediately out of her. So it is thus that it came about, the banishment of Fergus mac Róich and Cormac Con-loinges, son of Conchobor, and Dubthach the 'chafer of the Ulaid', and the death of Deirdre' (Dinneen 1908, 196). For Keating, it would appear, it was Deirdre's death, and how this was brought about, which most concerned him.¹⁸² Of the 87 copies of 'OCU' examined by Mac Giolla Léith (1993, 27–45), apart from G and RIA B iv 1 only three of these copies do not display the influence of Keating. These texts, designated 27, 78 and 83 by Mac Giolla Léith (id., 53), were compiled, respectively, in 1773–4, circa 1848, and 'sometime during

182 The colophon of LMU itself, which also notes the death of Deirdriu as a consequence of the events recounted, does so only after noting the deaths of the *maic Uislenn* (*aided mac n-Uislenn ocus Dardrenn*; LMU 1.319). Greater weight is placed upon the brothers' exile, and the banishment of Fergus (as 1 1.1.6, above).

the 19th century' (id., 36, 43, 45). All of the rest contain either Keating's introduction, his epilogue or, most often, both episodes, thus evincing the same preoccupation with Deirdre and her death, rather than the betrayal of the *maic Uisnig*.¹⁸³

Keating's account itself, as we have seen, has no title within FFE. The final phrase of its colophon, however, *bás Deirdre*, suggests that, had a title been required, Keating would have thought in terms of 'Bás Deirdre' itself, or, perhaps 'Oidheadh Derdrinne', rather than 'Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach'. Osborn Bergin's decision to christen this episode from FFE within his *Sgéalaigheacht Chéitinn* (1930), 'Marbhadh Chloinne hUisneach', does not reflect the impression gained either from its colophon or the tone of Keating's narrative. In the same way, referring to the entire collection of material compiled, post-LMU, as 'Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach', does not reflect the fact that the majority of these versions follow Keating's rendition rather than G. In terms of the present division of the post-LMU material into six distinct narrative strands (as 1.2, above), the description 'Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach' should be reserved for strands 3 and 5 alone, and either 'Bás Deirdre', or 'Oidheadh Derdrinne', should be applied to representations of strand 4.

2.3: Re-reading Deirdriu: a narratology

Earlier within this thesis it was proposed that the range of primary texts selected for analysis should, where possible, be subjected to the principles of narratological theory outlined by Tzvetan Todorov, in which the progression of each narrative examined is delineated by assessing the contribution, to its overall structure, of each action committed by each of its individual actants (as 2 1.2, above). This approach has the benefit of observing the cumulative effect of individual episodes upon the structure of a text of multi-layered complexity, such as LMU, rather than pursuing a generalised examination of themes, such as the alleged sovereign relationship between Conchobor, Deirdriu and Noísiu, whose importance, or relevance, to the text in question may not, in fact, be supported by a close-reading of the text itself. For the analysis of LMU, the classification of its multi-layered structure into a series of interlinked episodes, and the assessment of each actant's contribution to the progression of these episodes, has identified, *inter alia*, a far greater contribution made by Noísiu's brothers, Ainnle and Ardán, than previous commentary would lead us to expect (e.g. 3 2.2.3, above). Conversely, the precise identification of each of Deirdriu's contributions to the narrative, whether in speech or deed, reveals that most of her actions, which critics have usually held to be predominantly autonomous, are conducted in

183 The version within MS. King's Inns 29, i.e. Mac Giolla Léith's 32 (1993, 37), appends Keating's epilogue after a description of Deirdre's death in the brothers' grave, as if the author intended to be thorough in his presentation of both possible conclusions, but chose, ultimately, to demonstrate the greater authority of Keating's interpretation over that of any other. Keating's introduction is also included.

response to the activities of another actant (as 3 2.3, above). The application of narratological theory to the analysis of LMU has, in the present writer's opinion, revealed to a greater extent than before both the complexity of the narrative, and the skill with which the arrangement of its episodic structure has been managed. The conclusion reached by this thesis is that wider application of such theories to the close-reading of other contemporary texts would yield fruitful results. It seems likely that there are other tales, and series of tales, describing characters such as Deirdriu, whose personal reputation has gradually exceeded her actual importance to the structure of the material in which she is first described.

The usefulness of narratology to a text of the type of LMU – concise in length, and not suffering from significant textual loss – does not necessarily denote usefulness within a wider chronological context. It has been demonstrated that there are several issues concerning the application of narratological theory to the contents of G, due as much to the radically different nature of its textual structure as to the losses caused by the absent bifolium (as 4 1.2.1, above). Similar difficulties are likely to arise concerning the application of narratological theory within an Early Modern context, especially in cases where the recension developed during this era incorporates material from an earlier period (e.g. G, developed gradually from LMU, *Fochunn Loingse Fergus mac Roich*, and etcetera). As demonstrated by the case of G itself, the growth of inconsistencies within this type of portmanteau text becomes more prevalent as the corpus develops. Other aspects of the narratological approach, however, remain of use. Focusing upon the discernible presence of any text's internal narrator, and his contribution to the structure of the narrative, rather than upon the potential influence of its biographical author, is analytically beneficial, regardless of other limitations imposed by the transmission of the text or its current state of preservation. Particular advantages are likely to arise within the analysis of Early and Early Modern Irish tales, for the majority of which the identity of a biographical author cannot be established (as 2 1.2, above).

3: Epilogue

This thesis has assessed the gradual evolution of the character of Deirdriu within the Ulster Cycle, from her earliest occurrence to a brief consideration of the use to which her character was put by the authors of the Irish Renaissance. It has been argued that the prevalent critical opinion concerning Deirdriu's triangular relationship with Conchobor and Noísiu, and her implicit status as a sovereignty figure, is unsupported by a close reading of LMU, and that these aspects of her character were present only, if at all, within the context of *Aithed Derdrinne re maccaib Uislenn*, as reconstructed above. This thesis has also explored how Deirdriu's increasing popularity affected critical opinions regarding both herself and the range of material in which she is

described, and has argued that the authors of the Irish Renaissance played a crucial role in perpetuating this phenomenon. No less than six distinct strands of narrative material, in which Deirdriu and her effect upon the province of Ulster are described, have been identified, each of which have exerted varying degrees of influence upon subsequent accounts.

The suggestion has been advanced that, even if arguments concerning Deirdriu's possession of sovereignty status are put aside, the narrative of LMU nevertheless emphasises the importance of properly-maintained kingship to the welfare of the king's realm, and the disastrous situation in which his failure to observe these tenets may result. LMU's cumulative exposition of Conchobor's abuses of his *fír* is explored via the medium of Deirdriu, and her relationship to both Conchobor and the *maic Uislenn*, whose welfare, alongside Deirdriu's own, suffers the most injury in consequence of Conchobor's carelessness. The intricate construction of LMU has also been observed; likewise, the author's employment of technical devices such as prophecy, foreshadowing, and, most importantly for the progression of the text, the echoing and repetition of central themes, e.g. the reverse-reflection of events before and after the brothers' exile.

The present analysis of Deirdriu's development post-LMU has demonstrated that the state of preservation of G, the earliest-extant example of the process, has significantly altered the ways in which its contents have been interpreted. Attempts have been made by this thesis to address persistent misunderstandings concerning the manuscript's construction and pagination, and to emphasise the importance of considering G's opening section, the only one to describe Deirdre and the *maic Uisnig*, solely in the context of the manuscript in its entirety. It has been suggested that G is unique in its focus upon the exploits of Fergus mac Róich, and that, furthermore, only RIA B iv 1 can properly be referred to as 'Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach'. The basis for discerning the sequence and direction of development in the texts as whole is the identification of six distinct narrative strands (as above), the sixth being the miscellaneous collection of material produced during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Irish Renaissance. Suggestions have been made concerning the uses to which Deirdriu's character was put as each strand evolved, concluding that, until the innovations of Geoffrey Keating, the depiction of Deirdriu as an autonomous personality was not the texts' authors' primary concern. The intricacy with which these strands have been constructed, and the diverse nature of Deirdriu's characterisation within each one, suggests that our understanding of the role of characterisation within texts of this kind remains at an early stage. For the case of Deirdriu herself, it repudiates utterly the simplicity of Yeats's designation (Kelly and Schuchard 1994, 144) of her role as Ulster's "normal, compassionate, wise house-wife".

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